The Immigrant Experience

Fictional Immigrant Narratives as *Rites de Passages*

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Antropologen Arnold van Genneps begrep *rites de passage* ble lansert i 1909 i boken med samme navn. Begrepet beskriver overgangsperioder mennesker gjennomgår i sin personlige utvikling. Masteroppgaven min ser på hvordan immigrasjon til USA kan analyseres gjennom dette begrepsapparatet. Fokus er på hovedpersonenes *rites de passage* i følgende tre romaner: *How the García Girls Lost their Accents* (1991) av Julia Alvarez, *The Namesake* (2003) av Jhumpa Lahiri og *We Need New Names* (2013) av NoViolet Bulawayo. Oppgaven argumenterer for at de tre fasene i *rites de passage* kan belyse ulike stadier av immigrasjonsprosessen gjennom å beskrive overgangen fra å være en fremmed i samfunnet til å bli integrert og assimilert. I tillegg brukes i oppgaven også andre samfunnsvitenskapelige begrep i diskusjonen av integrasjonsprosessen. Marc Augés ”non-place” og Edward Relphs ”existential outsideness” anvendes til å belyse hvordan karakterene opplever de konkrete omgivelsene sine. Mary Douglas sitt begrep ”matter out of place” og Julia Kristevas abject brukes til å utforske hvordan karakterene føler seg utenfor det amerikanske samfunnet.

Hvert av de tre kapitlene i denne oppgaven fokuserer på en av fasene i *rites de passage.* Den første heter preliminalfasen, og for å tre inn i denne må en eller annen form for løsrivelse fra det vante og kjente livet skje. Kapittel 1 tar derfor for seg løsrivelsen for de tre hovedpersonene og viser til at de alle begynner sin *rites de passage* i ung alder. Det andre kapitlet fokuserer på liminalfasen, en fase hvor hovedpersonene føler seg fremmedgjort, utenfor samfunnet og i en overgangsfase av personlig utvikling. I løpet av denne fasen skal man ideelt sett være en *tabula rasa* og gi slipp på sin fortid slik at en forvandling kan finne sted for dermed å kunne fortsette til den siste fasen hvor integrering skjer. Siden ingen av hovedpersonene klarer dette, fokuserer det tredje kapitlet på hvordan karakterene fortsatt er i liminalfasen i slutten av romanene. Selv om disse tre tekstene omhandler hovedpersoner med ulike kulturelle bakgrunner opplever de alle å ikke nå den siste fasen av re-integrering, noe som viser til hvor vanskelig integrasjon faktisk er for en immigrant.

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Introduction

> So vanished and disappeared for ever a human being whom no one ever thought of protecting, who was dear to no one, in whom no one was the least interested, not even the naturalist who cannot resist sticking a pin in a common fly and examining it under the microscope; a being who endured the mockery of his colleagues without protesting, who went to his grave without any undue fuss. (Gogol 102)

In Nikolai Gogol's "The Overcoat" (1842), the reader follows the liminal character Akaky Akakievich to his death. Akaky leaves no legacy behind him when he dies, and, as the opening quotation indicates, not only is he neither missed nor mourned, he dies unacknowledged. Rather, this oppressed, unremarkable, and pitiful character exists only as a pawn within a huge bureaucratic system in St. Petersburg. The only remnant Akaky leaves behind is an impersonal one, namely his anonymous handwriting in all the letters that he has copied throughout his career as a civil service clerk. When the overcoat, the only cherished and meaningful item Akaky has is stolen, he withers away and dies. In the Introduction to *Diary of a Madman and Other Stories* Ronald Wilks writes that Akaky is a character that lives "in a city where the individual loses all identity" and is "a nonentity from the start" (12). Thus throughout "The Overcoat," the main character lives an inherently liminal life and never truly finds himself within St. Petersburg's impersonal system.

The story about Akaky Akakievich in "The Overcoat" figures prominently in *The Namesake* (2003) by Jhumpa Lahiri, which is one of the novels I have chosen to focus on in this thesis. In addition, I have selected the two other novels *How the García Girls Lost Their*

Accents (1991) by Julia Alvarez and *We Need New Names* (2013) by NoViolet Bulawayo. These three novels are contemporary novels, and I have chosen them as representations of the immigrant experience because they depict the arrival of "new immigrants" to the United States from three different continents.

This thesis examines how the three novels can be viewed as *rites de passages* and how this term can shed light on the immigrant process as this is represented in literature.[1] The focus is on three different kinds of immigrants: Gogol Ganguli the second-generation immigrant, Darling the illegal immigrant, and Yolanda García the exile. What these protagonists all have in common is that they go through *rites de passages*. The excerpt above from "The Overcoat," exemplifies the liminal phase, which is the second rite in Arnold van Gennep's concept *rites de passage*, and as we shall see in Chapter Two, the three protagonists all experience this phase as alienating. In the following chapters the discussion of the three novels addresses questions such as: How does the immigrant experience differ for characters who enter the United States from that of a second-generation immigrant? In what way is the immigration process expressed through the various *rites de passages*? Does incorporation, and thereby assimilation, take place?

The Literary Works

The novels all received critical acclaim when they were published. *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* was Julia Alvarez's debut novel and it won the PEN Oakland/ Josephine Miles Award. In addition, The American Library Association and *The New York Times* chose the novel as a notable book (Champion and Austin 11). Alvarez was born in New York and her family moved back to the Dominican Republic, only to return again to the United States as exile immigrants when Alvarez was ten years old (Caminero-Santangelo). In *How the García*

[1] The *rites de passage* is written in italics throughout this thesis because I follow Turner, who writes this French term in italics.

Girls Lost Their Accents she writes in reverse chronological order about the García family, their exile to the United States, and how the family adjusts to life in the United States. The narration consists of vignettes and shifts among the four García sisters' points of view in the chapters where at times they narrate together and at other times only one sister narrates. I have chosen to only focus on the third eldest sister, Yolanda and her immigrant experience, which spans from childhood to adulthood. Yolanda also narrates more chapters than the other sisters and is therefore more prominent as a character.

Jhumpa Lahiri, the author of *The Namesake* was already very successful prior to the publication of this novel. She won a Pulitzer Prize for her short story collection *The Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), and when she published *The Namesake*, which was her first novel, she once more received critical acclaim.[2] In fact, *The Namesake* was so successful that it was made into a film in 2006. Jhumpa Lahiri (or rather Nilanjana Sudeshna Lahiri,[3] the name on her birth certificate) lived the first three years of her life in London with her Bengali parents before they all moved to the United States (Maxey). In *The Namesake*, Lahiri uses her Bengali background and writes about the Gangulis, a Bengali couple who move to the United States, where they have two children. This thesis focuses on the Ganguli's eldest child Gogol and his life from a newborn to an adult. Although Gogol is born in the United States and therefore a second-generation immigrant, the experiences that he undergoes throughout the novel are very similar to a first-generation immigrant's. Both generations experience two contrasting cultures: their "old" heritage and the "new" American culture, and as we shall see the contrasts between the two lead Gogol as well as the two other protagonists to question their own identities. Thus, although Gogol does not physically move from one continent to

[2] Interestingly, a few months before *The Namesake* was published, *The New Yorker* published a novella called *Gogol* which in fact is an excerpt of *The Namesake* see http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2003/06/16/gogol (Lahiri "Gogol")

[3] Lahiri uses her "pet name" Jhumpa rather than her "good name" Nilanjana as an author (Maxey). This Bengali distinction between two kinds of names will be elaborated on in the next chapter.

another, he mentally goes through similar experiences that a first-generation immigrant would.

We Need New Names was NoViolet Bulawayo's debut novel and won among others the Hemingway Foundation/ PEN Award as well as the Guardian First Book Award. In addition, it was shortlisted for the Guardian First Book Award and the Man Booker Prize ("Noviolet").[4] Her name by birth is Elizabeth Tshele, but she writes under the pen name NoViolet Bulawayo.[5] She grew up in Zimbabwe, and it was not until she was 18 that she moved to the United States (Smith). *We Need New Names* actually began as a short story called "Hitting Budapest," for which Bulawayo won the Caine Prize for African Writing in 2011. The novel is therefore a continuation of the short story, as the first chapter is essentially the original "Hitting Budapest" (Allfrey). Darling, the main character of the novel, travels to the United States to live with her aunt on a tourist passport and continues to live there illegally after the visa's expiration date.

A Brief Historical Overview of Immigration after 1965 to the United States

> [W]ho doesn't know that the U.S.A. is the big baboon of the world? I feel like it's my country now because my aunt Fostalina lives there, in Destroyedmichygen. Once her things are in order she'll come and get me and I will go and live there also. (Bulawayo *WNNN* 49)

[4] In fact, *We Need New Names* was the first Zimbabwean novel to ever be nominated for the Man Booker Prize (Smith).

[5] Bulawayo's pen name evokes memories from her childhood. NoViolet, which means "with Violet," is in commemoration of her deceased mother who died when she was less than two years old. In addition, Bulawayo is the city where she grew up in Zimbabwe (Smith).

Many immigrants envision the American dream when moving to the United States the way Darling does in the quotation above. The history of immigration to this idealized country dates all the way back to 1680 when the first wave, the colonial immigrants, started to migrate to the United States. As the three novels portray immigration around the 1960s, a short overview of the 1965 act is included in this introductory chapter.

Prior to 1965 the United States discriminated between nations with regards to immigration. There were rules about which countries were allowed to immigrate and there was also a ban on Asian immigration to the United States. However, in 1965 there was a vast change: the Hart-Celler Immigration Law was passed which "installed a new global admissions system under which immigration reached all-time high levels by the end of the 20th century" (Waters and Ueda 2). The law was fully enacted in 1968 and the changes made for a more liberal and fair immigration policy which:

> put each nation in the Eastern Hemisphere on an equal footing by establishing a uniform limit of 20,000 entrants per country; it set an over-all hemispheric cap of 170,000 immigrants; and it established a "preference system" of family and occupational categories to allocate visas under these limits. (Massey 638)

While the immigrants in the earlier waves mostly came from Europe, after 1965 and still now in the 21st century, the new immigrants come from "countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa" (Waters and Ueda 3). The protagonists in the three immigrant novels all fit within the term "new immigrants," as they portray immigration to the United States from these continents during the second part of the 20th century (Gogol and Yolanda), as well as the beginning of the 21st century (Darling).

> What then is the American, this new man? … *He* is an American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. He becomes an American by being received in the broad lap of out great *Alma Mater*. Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men. (Crèvecoeur 312-13: original emphasis)

In the excerpt above, J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur presents a list of what is necessary for successful immigration and thereby also assimilation into American society ("all nations are melted into a new race of men"). He claims that one needs to leave behind the prejudices from one's homeland in order to embrace the "new." This idea is still present in today's discussions and debates on immigration and touches on questions of integration and assimilation.

Joshua L. Miller writes in his chapter about the immigrant novel between 1870 and 1940 that the genre "has been understood as a tale of arrival to a New World, which includes trials of belief in the self and the new nation, optimism and obstacles, economic and social acceptance, and conclusions of disillusioned Americanism" (200). According to him, this genre is broad and has never been "a homogenous form" (Miller 202). Rather, it was and still is a large genre that includes both fictional and non-fictional narratives, as well as authors with and without immigrant backgrounds. Furthermore, various literary movements and history have influenced this genre throughout the years (Miller 202).

One of the most common themes in immigrant novels is the idea of assimilation, but, interestingly, regarding this theme Miller writes that "the archive of US immigrant novels written between 1870 and 1940 makes evident that fewer novels than we might expect conform to these conventions, and assumptions of uniformity" (201). Chapter Three focuses

on whether the three protagonists are able to assimilate and if they manage to conform to American ideals.

The Theoretical Framework

As mentioned initially, for the parameters of this thesis, I use the anthropological concept *rites de passage* to explore how the protagonists experience the immigrant process. In the highly influential book *Les Rites de Passage* (1909), the French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep introduced the term as a way to classify transitions in societies. He argued that during a person's life many transitions occur: "man's life comes to be made up of a succession of stages with similar ends and beginnings: birth, social puberty, marriage, fatherhood, advancement to a higher class, occupational specialization, and death" (3). He distinguished between three phases which one had to go through in order to change from one position in society to another: "preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition), and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation)" (van Gennep 11).[6]

Unfortunately, van Gennep did not live to see how important his concept would become. *The Rites of Passage* was translated from French into English in 1960 because British anthropologists once more started to take an interest in French anthropology, and this was a book that influenced the British anthropologist Victor Turner (Thomassen *Liminality and the Modern* 71). Inspired by van Gennep's *rite of passage*, Turner has elaborated on the liminal phase, the second phase of van Gennep's theory. The Danish anthropologist Bjørn Thomassen writes that Turner found that liminality was important in order "to understand the human reactions to liminal experiences: the way in which personality was shaped by liminality, the sudden foregrounding of agency, and the sometimes dramatic tying together of

[6] It is important to note that the three rites are not as prominent in all the various kinds of *rites de passage*, which is shown in Chapter One where the length of the three protagonists' preliminal phases differs.

thought and experience" ("The Uses and Meanings of Liminality" 14). Turner claimed that one's personality is formed during the liminal phase because one experiences communitas, a transformative bond between liminal people. The *rites de passage*, then, comprise three different phases, and throughout the thesis I have chosen to apply the following terms for the phases:

1. *The preliminal phase* where the individual is detached from society either physically or symbolically.
2. *The liminal phase* where the individual is outside the structures of society, ambiguous, in-between two ways of being, and where communitas occurs.
3. *The re-incorporation phase* where the person is reintegrated into society and matures (Turner "Liminal to Liminoid" 57, 76).

Turner and van Gennep's concept of liminality has been used within literary theory to describe the phase where literary characters are in-between versions of themselves, at which point they can either develop fully or stay put in this phase. In *The Liminal Novel* (1996) Wangarĩ wa Nyatetũ Waigwa has developed a theory of "the liminal novel" instead of using the concept of *Bildungsroman* to analyze Francophone-African literature. The "liminal novel" consequently stands for a new kind of approach that is useful when analyzing novels that depict "the fate of the young person who has to negotiate a journey towards adulthood at the place where two cultures intersect" (Nyatetũ-Waigwa 9). She finds that "the protagonist is still in the middle of the quest, either still moving towards what supposedly constitutes the final stage in that quest or having consciously suspended the adoption of a final stance" (Nyatetũ-Waigwa 3). Whether this is the case for the three protagonists in the three chosen immigrant novels is explored in Chapter Three.

The concept of *rites de passage* as Nyatetũ Waigwa discusses in relation to postcolonial literature can also be applied to the literary study of immigrant novels because they share in common the conflicting relations to cultural identification. *Rites de passage* makes up a theoretical framework to explore the immigrant experience in three different phases: the life in the homeland prior to immigrating to another country, the middle or liminal phase where the move to the new makes the protagonist feel in-between the "old" and "new" identity, and the final phase where one is incorporated into society. In addition, reading "through" *rites de passage* gives insight into how the past intervenes with the present. An exploration of how the novels construct the protagonists' communitas, which is the experience of bonding, during their liminal phases can also give insight into who they identify with, what this communal bond indicates, and whether it enables a transformation during their liminal phases.

Other anthropological concepts are also employed in my analyses of the three immigrant narratives: Mary Douglas's term "matter out of place" and Marc Augé's "non-place." In her influential book *Purity and Danger* (1966), Douglas writes about how all things have a specific place within a society: purity is obtained when things are in order, while impurity is when something or someone is a "matter out of place." An example of this is how dirt contributes to structuring the society: "Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organise the environment" (Douglas 2). In Douglas's theory, then, human beings organize society according to whether things fit within a category or not, and therefore "certain moral values are upheld and certain social rules defined by beliefs in dangerous contagion" (3). Both visually and mentally any structure is upheld as long as "matter out of place" is kept under control. It is important to note that I apply Douglas' concept to a discussion of the immigrant experience, and thereby use it in another manner than Douglas does. As we shall see in the following chapters, "matter out of

place" is applied to explore how an anomalous element triggers the *rites de passage* (Chapter One), and how the protagonists feel anomalous during the liminal phase (Chapter Two).

Rather than distinguishing between places structurally as Douglas does, Augé in his theory of "non-place" focuses on the spatial, as his concept describes places "which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity" (Augé 63). This theory was first introduced in his important book *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1995) where Augé writes about how spaces such as the supermarket, motorway, and airport lounge are "non-places," as they are merely places of transit in-between identities. In Chapter Two, I expand this theory to include all liminal spaces where the protagonists are during their liminal phase. As we shall, see the "non-place" is applied in my analysis to shed light on how the protagonists experience the spaces they occupy.

In addition, Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject, Homi Bhabha's ideas of hybridity, and Edward Relph's "existential outsideness" are part of the theoretical framework.[7] Kristeva's theory of the abject was first introduced in her book *Powers of Horror* (1982). This term explains that which is neither an object nor a subject but rather something which "lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated" (Kristeva 1). Rather the abject must be banished "from the place of the living subject, propelled away from the body and deposited on the other side of an imaginary border which separates the self from that which threatens the self" (Creed 46). Similarly to Douglas's theory of "matter out of place," Kristeva's abject describes anomalous elements in society.[8] In Chapter One, these two terms are applied to discuss how abnormal elements can be disruptive and cause the protagonists to enter the preliminal phase. In order to enter this phase some sort of detachment has to occur. Douglas's

[7] Christine Steira refers to Relph in her MA thesis "Constructions of Life: (Be)Longing and (Dis)Location in the Autobiographical Writings of Edward Said, Eva Hoffman, and Ihab Hassan," but unlike Steira I do not mainly draw on his theory, but rather only apply the term "existential outsider" to my analyses of the novels.

[8] For criticism of both Douglas and Kristeva's theories of anomalous elements see Duchinsky (2013)

theory of "matter out of place" is about how things are kept in order within a structure, and, as we shall see in Chapter One, some anomalous element is the reason that the detachment occurs for Yolanda and Gogol.

Bhabha's concept of hybridity was first introduced in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994). According to him, a hybrid identity forms when one merges and translates two cultures into one new cohesive identity. This differs from the previous identity as it only contains traces of the past two cultures. This translation occurs within what Bhabha calls the "third space" and "gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (Bhabha "The Third Space, Interview with Homi Bhabha" 211). I apply this concept to Gogol's liminal phase in Chapter Two.

In *Place and Placelessness* (1976) Relph writes that, "[t]o be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places: to be human is to have and to know *your* place" (1: original emphasis). In his analysis of place, he distinguishes between the experience of being "inside" and "outside" of a place as the "difference between safety and danger, cosmos and chaos, enclosure and exposure, or simply here and there" (Relph 49). Relph also establishes seven categorizes which describe the various ways one can experience "insideness" or "outsideness" with regard to a place.[9] In Chapter Three I discuss how two of the immigrant protagonists fit Relph's category of "existential outsider."

I have chosen the above-mentioned concepts as part of my theoretical framework because they are all relevant to explore the immigrant protagonists' liminal phases. In fact, these terms shed light on three different aspects of this in-between phase. Firstly, "non-place" and "existential outsideness" are both spatial concepts, and I apply them to discuss the *spatial* aspect of the protagonists' liminal phases. As shown above, during this second phase of the *rites de passage* the liminars are outside of the structures of society where they are in-between

[9] See Relph (1976) pp. 51-55 for a detailed description of the seven categories.

identities. Similarly, “non-place” illustrates how places can be viewed as a place where one has no identity, as they are only places of transit. Furthermore, “existential outsideness” is about the experience of spatially having no sense of belonging. Both these terms then comment on the protagonists’ spatial experiences during their immigration process.

Secondly, “matter out of place” and the abject are terms that are useful to explore how the protagonists’ are *structurally* liminal. During the liminal phase one is structurally undefined, and as we shall see in the following chapters, the three protagonists experience themselves as “anomalous” in the United States. In fact, Turner himself refers to Douglas’s theory and acknowledges the fact that it can be employed to describe people within the liminal phase as they “are particularly polluting, since they are neither one thing nor another, or may even be both, neither here nor there and may even be nowhere” (Turner "Betwixt and Between" 512). In other words, Turner claims that the liminal phase and “matter out of place” describe similar phenomenon as both theories comment on what is outside the structure of society.

Thirdly, for Bhabha the liminal phase and the “third space” are essentially the same thing. Thomassen writes that in Bhabha’s theory “liminality relates to cultural hybridity. In much postmodern literature, the liminal positively has come to represent an interstitial position between fixed identifications” ("The Uses and Meanings of Liminality" 18). There is however one important distinction between Bhabha and early Turner/van Gennep, and this is that Bhabha does not recognize “that liminality needs to end somehow” (Thomassen "The Uses and Meanings of Liminality" 18). According to Bhabha the liminal phase is thus a *creative space* where one can translate and recreate one’s identity. The concepts then, illuminate how the liminal phase is spatially, structurally and creatively a space for the protagonists.

The Bildungsroman and the Rites de Passage

Just like the *rites de passage,* the *Bildungsroman* is about transition. In his early definition of the *Bildungsroman* protagonist Wilhelm Dilthey (1870) writes that this is a character "who enters into life in a blissful state of ignorance, seeks related souls, experiences friendship and love, struggles with the hard realities of the world and thus armed with a variety of experiences, matures, finds himself and his mission in the world" (Hardin xiv). This definition includes both the liminal phase (the struggling with the world) and the re-incorporation phase (the maturing and finding one's mission and place in the world). Turner also comments on the similarities between the *Bildungsroman* and *rites de passage*: "literary critics speak of the nineteenth century *Bildungsroman,* the story of 'our hero's' progress from poverty to glory, innocence to experience, as a '*rite de passage*' or 'an initiation,' with a linear irreversible monological diachronic progression" ("Variations" 43: original emphasis). The *Bildungsroman*, then, can be viewed as the literary counterpart to the cultural and social *rites de passage*.

However, the *Bildungsroman* is a very debated genre and theorists disagree whether it is applicable to contemporary literature. The Germanist scholars, who only find the genre applicable to German literature, claim that the *Bildungsroman* no longer exists, and "is an historical German genre expressing bourgeois ideals of learning and development that were current in Germany in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries" (Iversen 26). Others argue that the *Bildungsroman* genre is still present in literature today. Tobias Boes comments, "the novel of formation continues to thrive in post-colonial, minority, multi-cultural, and immigrant literatures worldwide" (239). An example of a scholar within this second group is Stella Bolaki, who problematizes the genre in her analysis of ethnic American novels. In *Unsettling the Bildungsroman* (2011), she explores how the works she studies "unsettle the compromising closure of the *Bildungsroman*" and examines how the texts challenge "the

developmental narrative of assimilation, the different manifestations of 'normality,' and the genre's blindness to difference" (Bolaki 12-13: original emphasis). [10] I understand Bolaki's claim that the *Bildungsroman* is "blind to difference" to mean that the genre does not take into account how the world can be experienced differently. There is a huge contrast in how for example an American experiences the United States compared to how an immigrant experiences it. As we know, the protagonist in the *Bildungsroman* goes through the various stages of development to find his or her "mission in the world" (cf. Dilthey). However, analyzing this development as *rites de passage* gives insight into how the three stages can be differently experienced by characters. In Chapter Two, for example, Darling's liminal phase has to do with her surroundings, while Gogol's has more to do with his sense of self.

Furthermore, the *rites de passage* may better be able to shed light on the challenges regarding the "narrative of assimilation" (cf. Bolaki.). *Rites de passage* has a rich analytical framework divided into three phases, all of which can be employed to signify the various stages of the immigration process that the protagonists go through. While the preliminal phase can describe the detachment which occurs in the homeland and thereby also a detachment from a previous version of oneself, the liminal phase can be applied to analyze how the meeting with a new country and culture makes the immigrant protagonist feel in-between identities and structurally not yet a part of society. As for re-incorporation, the third and final phase, it can be employed to describe assimilation into society. These phases are important in the discussion of the immigrant experience as they underline aspects such as alienation and the loss of a sense of belonging both spatially and structurally.

[10] In Chapter Three I similarly to Bolaki discuss whether the three chosen immigrant novels depict protagonists who are able to assimilate.

The Chapters

The first chapter, "The Protagonists' Preliminal Phases," is a discussion of how the three protagonists begin their *rites de passages*. Since these are individual experiences, the movement into the first phase is very different for the three protagonists. With regards to Darling, I argue that she in fact from the onset of the novel already has entered the preliminal phase and therefore the focus is on her experiences in the shantytown Paradise during this period. As for the other two protagonists, Yolanda and Gogol, I explore how they enter the phase as some kind of detachment from the old life occurs. I argue that the reason the protagonists enter this phase is because an anomalous element interferes in their life. In this chapter, therefore, the terms "matter out of place" and the abject are applied to illuminate what these elements are.

"The "Nowhere" Protagonists" focuses on the protagonists' liminal phases and has two sections. The first is a discussion of how the three protagonists experience the in-between phase, both spatially and structurally. Yolanda and Darling's entrance into the liminal phases coincides with their arrival to the United States. Gogol, the second-generation immigrant, on the other hand, experiences a more abstract form of separation from his sense of self. While the first section focuses on the phase in general, the second specifically explores the protagonists' communitas.

The third and final chapter is a discussion of whether or not the endings of the novels depict protagonists who manage to exit the liminal phase. As we shall see, I argue that none of the three novels end with a (re-)incorporation into American society. Rather, the discussion shows that Gogol and Darling regress to past memories as a way to cope with their present lives. Yolanda, on the other hand, is drawn back to the past in her haunting nightmares. In addition, both Yolanda and Darling have no sense of belonging to the spaces that surround them and are therefore "existential outsiders." Thus, the endings of these immigrant novels

have no resolution and do not portray assimilation, as the protagonists are not able to leave behind their “ancient prejudices and manners” (cf. Crèvecoeur).

Chapter 1 – The Protagonists' Preliminal Phases

Darling's Childhood: A Story of Loss

NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, which begins in Zimbabwe, is a novel full of loss. In fact, already in the beginning of the novel Darling and her family have lost their house: "We didn't always live in this tin, though. Before, we had a home and everything and we were happy. It was a real house made of bricks, with a kitchen, sitting room, and two bedrooms" (Bulawayo *WNNN* 62). Policemen destroyed their home and the family was forced to move to the shantytown Paradise.[11] What they are left with in their tin house is a "small bed that sits on some bricks and poles" (Bulawayo *WNNN* 63).

The experience Darling recalls resonates with Bolaki's approach to trauma as a central theme in *Bildungsromane*. She argues that "[s]hifting our attention from what is lost to the ways in which traces of loss *persist* through melancholic attachments can paradoxically illuminate the creative potential of trauma" (36: original emphasis). This is relevant with regard to Darling: a melancholic attachment to a previous lost life, or rather a way of living is present in Darling's childhood. She along with her family is traumatized after having lost their "real house." Since this trauma has happened prior to the beginning of the novel, I argue that it starts with Darling *already* in the preliminal phase because she has, as Turner writes, been separated from a previous social structure.[12]

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[11] This episode resonates with real-life because Bulawayo writes in *The Guardian* that she was inspired to write the novel after having seen a picture of the aftermath of Operation Murambasvina, an operation started by President Robert Mugabe to force urban settlers out of their homes ("*The Guardian* Article").

[12] In fact, it can be argued that the life in the "real house" also is a preliminal phase because she is detached from that life when moving to Paradise. In other words, Darling has two

The preminal phase is the first of the three rites in the *rites de passage.* This phase "comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions (a 'state')" (Turner "Betwixt and Between" 510). For the protagonist Darling the preliminal phase takes place in the shantytown Paradise, where she lives with her mother and her grandmother, Mother of Bones. As we have seen above, her family has been forced to move from their house and she is therefore detached from an "earlier fixed point." When entering the preliminal phase, there is a construction of "a cultural realm which is defined as 'out of time,' that is, beyond or outside the time which measures secular processes and routines" (Turner "Liminal to Liminoid" 57). One example of such "out of time-ness" in Darling's life is that the secular process of education no longer is present since all the teachers have left. With no possibility of going to school, Darling and her friends spend their days playing, finding food and by making the time pass.

One episode, which exemplifies the extraordinary and unknown conditions that Darling lives in, is when the children see a woman who has hung herself. They initially react with shock and start running after having seen the terrifying hanging body whose "eyes are the scariest part, they are almost too white, and they look like they want to pop out" (Bulawayo *WNNN* 17). However, when Darling's friend Bastard suggests that they can steal the dead woman's shoes, sell them and buy loaf for the money, nobody is opposed to his idea. Rather, "the dizzying smell of Lobels bread all around us now, and then we are rushing, then we are running, then we are running and laughing and laughing and laughing" (Bulawayo *WNNN* 18). In this scene, the children's situation as being "outside of time" is evident as their lives differ vastly from the ones they lived before. When Darling lived in the "real house," her parents were able to provide her with food. In Paradise, on the other hand, Darling is

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consequtive preliminal phases. However, for the parameters of this thesis, I only focus on the preliminal phase in Paradise, as it occurs right before Darling moves to the United States.

constantly hungry because her mother cannot afford to buy enough food for her family. During their preliminal phases, then, the children are driven by hunger in their "out of time."

Matter out of Place and the Abject in Childhood

The scene of the hanged woman can be seen as an example of Douglas's "matter out of place" and Kristeva's the abject. Let us remember that "matter out of place" is a term that describes elements or people who do not fit within the order of a society's structure. Similarly, the abject is a concept that denotes that which "disturbs identity, system, order" (Kristeva 4). As we saw in the Introductory Chapter, these terms describe how anomalous elements are disruptive and cause the two protagonists Gogol and Yolanda to enter their preliminal phase. This fits well with what Turner writes about this first phase of *rites de passage,* because one is here detached from an "earlier fixed point in the social structure" (Turner "Betwixt and Between").

With regards to Darling, on the other hand, these two terms function differently because she is already in the preliminal phase from the onset of the novel. Rather, the abject and "matter out of place" refer to elements of her childhood, such as her friend Chipo. She is a "matter out of place" in Darling's childhood in the shantytown Paradise, because her pregnancy at such a young age does not conform to the image of the child. In all societies, there is a distinction between young and older people, and as Anne Murcott writes, "[c]hild and adult are mutually exclusively conceptualised… it is adults who bear and beget children; a child cannot beget or bear a child" (7). Chipo is a kind of contaminant in Darling's preliminal phase because what Douglas calls the division of impure and pure has been broken: Darling is a "pure" element following the norms of society, while Chipo is "impure" in breach of Murcott's "a child cannot bear a child." She has therefore broken the normal progression of development from childhood to adulthood. Rather than being in the preliminal phase with

Darling, Chipo is in the ambiguous liminal phase – in-between being a child and an adult mother. The fact that Chipo is in-between two life phases also makes her abject. As Kristeva writes, the abject "lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated," and this is exactly what Chipo is, neither conforming to childhood nor adulthood. By being both "matter out of place" and abject, Chipo then, even if she only is a year older than Darling, has a different *rites de passage* structure than the one I argue that Darling follows.

Since Chipo and Darling are friends, however, a very adult situation is part of her childhood. When Darling finds out the truth about Chipo's pregnancy, her innocence is evident in that she does not know how to deal with it:

> He did that, my grandfather, I was coming from playing Find bin Laden and my grandmother was not there and my grandfather was there and he got on me and pinned me down like that and he clamped a hand over my mouth and was heavy like a mountain, Chipo says, words coming out all at once like she is Mother of Bones. I watch her and she has this look I have never seen before, this look of pain. I want to laugh that her voice is back, but her face confuses me and I can also see she wants me to say something, something maybe important, so I say, Do you want to go and steal guavas? (Bulawayo *WNNN* 40-41)

Rather than talking about the rape that Chipo confides to her, Darling reacts by changing the conversation to something which is within her range of knowledge as a child: food. This shows her innocence in that she does not know how to react to her friend's pregnancy. Instead, the way Darling and the other girls try to cope with this pregnancy is through a game, thereby taking the pregnancy into a realm that they know. They have gotten the idea that they need to get rid of the baby because they have heard about another girl who died "from giving

birth" (Bulawayo *WNNN*). Darling and her friends play many games such as "Country Game", "Find bin Laden" and they also sing "Vasco da Gama," but, the surgical game in the "We Need New Names" chapter differs from the others. This is because the children's goal with the game is to get rid of the stomach so that Chipo becomes a child once more, thereby regaining the order in society by getting rid of the anomalous pregnancy (cf. Douglas). This game, therefore, can be viewed as an attempt to retrieve Chipo away from the liminal phase and back to the preliminal phase where the other children are. The game blends fiction with reality: the fictional element is that the children pretend to be the doctors from the TV-series *ER* when trying to remove Chipo's very real pregnant stomach. Thus, the game is interesting in that it shows the children's young age, innocence and naivety in dealing with what they call "a woman thing" (Bulawayo *WNNN* 78). They therefore acknowledge the fact that a pregnancy is an adult thing, an abject "matter out of place" permeating their childhood.

The Sick Father

Similarly to Chipo, Darling's father does not fit within society's structure. When he returns from South Africa, he is very sick with AIDS and I suggest that he also is in the liminal phase: in-between life and death, an untouchable. Like Chipo, Darling's father is a contaminant in several ways in her childhood, as Darling needs to cope with his sickness at a young age. Furthermore, the father is also a "matter out of place" in Paradise as his sickness makes him "impure" and he is therefore hidden as a secret in the shack after his return from South Africa. This hiding is a way of separating the "pure" inhabitants of the shantytown from the "impure," anomalous, and sick father.

Turner writes that during the liminal phase, people are metaphorically "dead to the social world, but alive to the asocial world" ("Liminal to Liminoid" 59). In the novel, Darling's father is described as a non-human, for instance, in that he is given animalistic and

monstrous traits: he looks "like a monster up close" with "crocodile teeth and egg-white eyes" and "lifts his bones and pushes a claw" (Bulawayo *WNNN* 90). Furthermore, he is viewed by Darling as a tree both with regard to smell ("smelling like something dead in there, dead and rotting, his body a black, terrible stick") and touch ("He feels like dry wood in my hands") (Bulawayo *WNNN* 89, 103). Through these images, the father is a dry, decaying, and immobile tree which differs vastly from the description of a human being. Not only is Darling's father metaphorically dead, as Turner claims one is during one's liminal phase, he is in fact literally very close to dying. These are quite horrific images that Darling has to deal with and her father is therefore both a visual and physical "matter out of place" in her childhood.

On his deathbed, Darling's father is "*sick and all bones*" and he is largely described as a living corpse awaiting his death (Bulawayo *WNNN* 96: original emphasis). Kristeva writes that "[t]he corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object" (4). The father's body is abject to Darling because it infects and contaminates her childhood. It is important to remember that the abject, along with the liminal phase, and "matter out of place" all shed light on how Darling is "outside of time" in her preliminal phase, where she experiences things that are anomalous compared to the time prior to entering her *rites de passage*. The fact that Darling's father is in the liminal phase awaiting death is traumatic for Darling, as she does not want him to die:

> [T]he thought of him dead and gone-gone scares me. It's not like he'll be in South Africa, for example, where it is possible to tell yourself and other people that since that's where he went then maybe one day he will return. Death is not like that, it is final, like that girl hanging in a tree because as we later found out from the letter in her

> pockets, she had the Sickness and thought it was better to just get it over with and kill herself. (Bulawayo *WNNN* 102)

The idea that her father will die and turn into a corpse, like the dead woman in the tree, is an abjection to Darling because it "disturbs [her] identity, system, order" in the way she sees her life (Kristeva 4). Death as final ("gone-gone") is scary to Darling as there is no way of seeing her father again, and another loss will be added to what she already has lost (cf. Bolaki). Thus, during Darling's childhood she experiences suicide (the woman who hung herself), childhood pregnancy and a sick father with AIDS – all three examples of "matter out of place" and the abject which mark her preliminal phase as they indicate a detachment and an "outside-ness of time" from the way she lived prior to moving to Paradise.

Waiting as Transitional

For Darling, the time in Paradise is supposed to be temporary because her Aunt Fostalina who lives in the United States is going to take her there. In my opinion, the whole preliminal phase, then, is "out of time" as Darling already anticipates her future life in the United States. This waiting is commented on by Darling prior to her move: "when that time comes, I'll not even be here; I'll be living in America", "it won't be long, you'll see," and "[o]nce her things are in order she'll come and get me and I will go and live there also" (Bulawayo *WNNN* 10, 14, 49). All the three excerpts have in common that there is an uncertainty as to when Darling's aunt will arrive, and therefore all Darling can do is wait. The Italian sociologist Giovanni Gasparini writes that "[w]aiting may be considered both as a gap and as a link between the present and the future" (30). Darling's time in Zimbabwe, then, is the present but not really of the present: it is rather a gap of time spent in the present awaiting the future life in the United States.

This gap of waiting is not only "out of time," but it also marks a transitional phase for Darling – taking her from her preliminal phase in Zimbabwe to the liminal phase in the United States. Gasparini goes on to note that the time of waiting "may be considered as 'interstitial time' *par excellence* in contemporary Western societies" (29: original emphasis). Even though he explicitly focuses on Western societies, the quality of interstitiality also applies to "other" times like Darling's waiting in Paradise, as it is a time in-between two phases of her life.

The interstiality of time in Paradise resonates with an observation from Turner who writes, "[t]he passage from one social status to another is often accompanied by a parallel passage in space, a geographical movement from one place to another" and that "the spatial passage may involve a long, exacting pilgrimage and the crossing of many national frontiers before the subject reached his goal" ("Liminal to Liminoid" 58). Both a temporal and spatial passage, then, is part of Darling's transition from the preliminal phase to the liminal phase.

Yolanda's Childhood: Dictatorship as "Matter out of Place"

Unlike *We Need New Names,* which begins with Darling already in the preliminal phase at the beginning of the novel, Yolanda in *How the García Girls Lost their Accents* starts as an innocent child sheltered from the tough realities that take place around her. As the novel goes chronologically backwards and is divided into three different sections, this chapter focuses on the third subsection where Yolanda's childhood in the Dominican Republic between 1956 and 1960 is depicted. Yolanda grows up in a house with her three sisters, mother and father, and together they live within a family compound with other relatives living "side by side in adjoining houses on a piece of property which belonged to my grandparents" (Alvarez 225). Due to the wealth of her family, Yolanda grows up with maids and is used to a carefree life.

Her days consist of going to school and playing with her cousins who live in houses right next to her. Yolanda's childhood, therefore, initially seems peaceful and untroubled.

Dictatorship as "Matter out of Place"

However, there is something lurking in the background of Yolanda's childhood which she initially is unaware of: Rafael Trujillo's dictatorship is itself a "matter out of place." A dictator rules over a society the way he wants to rather than adhering to the structure that everyone wishes for, and therefore, in Douglas's words "offends against society" (2). Early in her childhood, Yolanda is not aware of what is taking place around her:

> But what did we kids know of all that back in those days? The height of violence for us was on the weekly television Western imported from Hollywood and dubbed clumsily in Spanish … As for the violence around us, the guards' periodic raids, the uncles whose faces no longer appeared at the yearly holiday gatherings, we believed the slogan at station identification – "God and Trujillo are taking care of you." (Alvarez 227)

Yolanda along with her cousins lives a sheltered life where they are not informed of the dictatorship which they live in. Violence, the guards, and the death of uncles are all due to the "matter out of place" on the Island. The harsh reality of the dictatorship is kept from her and she accepts the slogan that groups the dictator alongside with God.

As Yolanda grows older her country's situation gradually becomes clearer. She hears about the Trujillo's *guardias*: "who could be anywhere at anytime like guardian angels, except they don't keep you from doing bad but wait to catch you doing it" (Alvarez 197-98). Yolanda's image of the *guardias* can be read according to the abject as these characters are

nothing like the angelic connotations they are given and because they do not respect rules or borders (cf. Kristeva). Furthermore, when Yolanda sees the *guardias* in her family's house, they have guns, which she knows is illegal. According to Kristeva "[a]ny crime, because it draws attention to the fragmentation of the law, is abject" (4). Thus both the description and the appearance of the *guardias*, who are a representation of the dictatorship, give them qualities that make them "matter out of place" and abject.

"Matter out of Place" and the Preliminal Phase

Although Yolanda has some knowledge about the dictatorship, I suggest that her preliminal phase does not occur before she faces and is confronted with the "matter out of place" dictatorship. As we saw earlier, I argue that the transition into the preliminal phase can occur because of an anomalous moment or character. For Yolanda this anomalous moment is when the *guardias* enter her family's house in search of her father, thereby creating disorder and detaching her from the life she is used to.

This anomalous moment should be elaborated on, as it is an important one for Yolanda. Right before the *guardias* enter the house wanting to talk to her father, Yolanda sees him run up the stairs while she is playing "Statues" with her sisters and cousins. Initially she thinks that he is playing a game with her, "But Papi is not playing a game now because soon after he runs by in hide-and-seek, the doorbell rings, and Chucha lets in those two creepy-looking men" (Alvarez 197). With this realization, Yolanda's role changes from participating in a game with her sisters and cousins to a more serious game of hide and seek where she understands that it is crucial for her not to reveal where her father is hiding. This initiates the preliminal phase as it takes her away from her "normal routines" (cf. Turner). Furthermore, according to Turner, people within the preliminal phase perform "symbolic behavior – especially symbols of reversal or inversion of secular things, relationships, and processes –

which represents the detachment of the ritual subjects" (Turner "Liminal to Liminoid" 57). Yolanda experiences a symbolic inversion of relationships during her preliminal phase: rather than being the child who is taken care of, she now needs to take care of her father by not revealing his hiding place. In order to keep the secret, Yolanda, also nicknamed "Yoyo," acts differently than she wants to: "Yoyo wants to cry, too, but she is sure if she does, the men will get suspicious and take her father away and maybe the whole family" (Alvarez 199-200). The reversal of relationships and change in behavior indicates that Yolanda is "out if time." Although Yolanda is within her known realm, her house, the time spent with the *guardias* marks a detachment from her old life.

When the *guardias* visit her family's house, the García family's lives are forever changed. The American CIA agent Victor Hubbard is the one who resolves the "matter out of place" in Yolanda's life as he gets rid of the *guardias* and also sends the García family to the United States as exiles because Yolanda's father is against Trujillo's regime. Similarly to Darling, Yolanda experiences a spatial passage "from one social status to another" as she moves from one country to another (Turner "Liminal to Liminoid" 58). This exile coincides with Yolanda entering the liminal phase, which is elaborated more on in the next chapter. Yolanda's preliminal phase, then, is much shorter than Darling's as it only lasts for days and not months. But as is shown below, Gogol's preliminal phase is even shorter, as it only lasts for a short moment.

Gogol's Childhood: The Trouble with a Name

In the beginning of the novel, Gogol is a young child who lives with his family in Cambridge, Massachusetts. This family consists of the first-generation immigrants Ashima and Ashoke Ganguli, and their second-generation immigrant children Gogol and Sonia. Gogol's parents are Bengali who want to continue with their traditions while living in the United States, and

therefore Gogol's childhood is filled with Bengali gatherings every Saturday, Bengali classes, the learning about Indian deities, reading Bengali poetry, seeing Bengali performances, and celebrating pujos.[13] Yet, at the same time, the Ganguli family incorporates American traditions into their lives, such as celebrating Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Easter. Furthermore, they let their children eat American food and go to American schools. Gogol then, grows up with two distinct cultures and this duality is not problematic during his childhood, but rather becomes an issue in his preliminal moment, as is shown below.[14]

The "Pet Name" as Public

Within Bengali culture there is a tradition to give a child two names: "a pet name" and "a good name." The pet name, or rather the *daknam* in Bengali, is "the name by which one is called, by friends, family, and other intimates, at home and in other private, unguarded moments" (Lahiri *The Namesake.* 26). In contrast, the good name (*bhalonam*) is used "for identification in the outside world. Consequently, good names appear on envelopes, on diplomas, in telephone directories, and in all other public places" (Lahiri *The Namesake.* 26). Furthermore, while the pet name can be a silly name, a good name tends to have more "dignified and enlightened qualities" (Lahiri *The Namesake.* 26). Hence, there is a differentiation in names used in private and in public spaces distinguishing between a personal and an official name.

Gogol's parents want to continue with this tradition when he is born, but because the name Ashima's grandmother has chosen for the newborn does not arrive in the mail, things do not go as planned. They resort to involuntarily defy their nomenclature tradition and give their son the pet name Gogol that they write on his birth certificate, thereby making the private

[13] Pujos is the "celebration of the Mother Goddess, and the victory of the reversed warrior Goddess Durga over the evil buffalo demon Mahishasur" (Cook)

[14] Since Gogol's preliminal phase only lasts for an instant, I have chosen to call it a "preliminal moment."

name public. This name is chosen impulsively by Ashoke and is a name of great importance to him, which is elaborated more on in Chapter Three.

By having had to go against their Bengali tradition, the name Gogol is already a "matter out of place" for Ashima and Ashoke. This is apparent when they "see their son's pet name typed on the label of a prescription for antibiotics, when they see it at the top of his immunization record, *it doesn't look right*; pet names aren't meant to be made public in this way" (Lahiri *The Namesake.* 36: emphasis added). The traditional structure of having two names is not followed and because Gogol is used as the good name, disorder occurs. For Gogol's parents the only way to restructure their "matter out of place" is to give him a "good name" and use Gogol as the "pet name."

"Good Name" vs. "Pet Name"

Ashima and Ashoke find that the day Gogol starts kindergarten is the perfect time to solve their "matter out place" once and for all. They want Gogol to start using the name Nikhil as his good name, because "Nikhil, is artfully connected to the old. Not only is it a perfectly respectable Bengali good name, meaning "he who is entire, encompassing all," but it also bears a satisfying resemblance to Nikolai, the first name of the Russian Gogol" (Lahiri *The Namesake.* 56). With this solution, then, the protagonist will have two names and finally follow the Bengali nomenclature tradition.

Except, to Gogol the name Nikhil is now a "matter out of place": "It would be one thing if his parents were to call him Nikhil, too. But they tell him that the new name will be used only by the teachers and children at school. He is afraid to be Nikhil, someone he doesn't know. Who doesn't know him" (Lahiri *The Namesake.* 57). Being used to "Gogol," he finds that the new name disrupts the order he has in the world. The new name is an instance of the abject as it disturbs his "identity, system, order" (Kristeva 4): Nikhil seems to

be a foreign person who Gogol is afraid of. As a young innocent child only five of years age, Gogol does not accept his parent's suggestion and when the principal asks if he wants to be called Nikhil, Gogol answers by shaking his head. This rejection of the name restores the order because the anomalous name is no longer part of Gogol's life.

The Preliminal Moment

It is in fact a few years later that his own name "Gogol" becomes a "matter out of place" and an abjection to himself. At the age of eleven Gogol participates in a fieldtrip where they go to a graveyard, and this is the setting where "the peculiarity of his name becomes apparent" (Lahiri *The Namesake.* 68). Prior to this episode, Gogol has not had any trouble with his name:

> As a young boy Gogol doesn't mind his name. He recognizes pieces of himself in road signs: GO LEFT, GO RIGHT, GO SLOW. For birthdays his mother orders a cake on which his name is piped across the white frosted surface in a bright blue sugary script. It all seems perfectly normal. It doesn't bother him that his name is never an option on key chains or metal pins or refrigerator magnets. He has been told that he was named after a famous Russian author, born in a previous century. That the author's name, and therefore his, is known throughout the world and will live on forever. (Lahiri *The Namesake.* 66)

So far Gogol has accepted the name, but following the realization in the graveyard, there is a change in the tone: "then, suddenly, the crayon meets with slight resistance, and letters, one after another, emerge magically on the page: ABIJAH CRAVEN, 1701–45. Gogol has never met a person named Abijah, just as, he now realizes, he has never met another Gogol" (Lahiri

The Namesake. 69-70). A sudden awareness, then, occurs in the graveyard where he understands the rarity and outlandishness of his own name. The graveyard as the setting for this realization is interesting as this is a place of death, and I suggest that the setting mirrors the undoing of Gogol's identity. Just like all the graves with the dead surrounding him, the epiphany leads to a kind of death of his identity because he no longer sees his world as the same. For Gogol, his own name becomes as foreign to him as the name Abijah. A crucial part of his identity, his own name becomes buried along with all the other corpses.

The realization in the graveyard is Gogol's preliminal moment because this is when he sees the world in a new way, or, as Turner writes, is detached from "an earlier fixed point in the social structure" ("Betwixt and Between" 510). Rather than having a long preliminal phase, this short epiphany marks Gogol's preliminal moment as it separates him from the previous way he thought of himself and his surroundings. The epiphany is therefore Gogol's moment "out of time" and during this time Gogol's name has become a "matter out of place." The name is not related to any part of him – neither the American nor the Bengali side but rather to a Russian author. The scholar Ruediger Heinze writes in his analysis of this scene that it is during the field trip Gogol realizes "that his personal name has no history, neither in his culture, his family nor anywhere else" (194). Rather than being similar to another name, Gogol sees parts of his name in inanimate objects such as signs which give imperative orders of "GO."

The abject is "radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses" (Kristeva 2). In the graveyard, an abject place in itself as it is full of corpses; the whole meaning of Gogol's identity breaks down. The name no longer has any significance for him and is a "matter out of place" in various ways. Furthermore, it has become opposed to the protagonist in the preliminal moment due to it no longer fitting within Gogol's "identity, system, order" (Kristeva 4). The lack of linking the name to any part of his identity makes his

own name foreign and he therefore rejects the name. Thus, Gogol's preliminal moment is when he finds the name, the very essence of his identity, abject and "matter out of place." With the preliminal phase being only a moment of realization for Gogol, he enters the liminal phase. He is separated from the identity he has had as a child, and enters a liminal phase where he experiences an identity crisis, which is elaborated on further in the next chapter.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has shown how the terms abject and "matter out of place" can shed light on the anomalous elements that are the reason that the protagonists begin their *rites de passage*. The three protagonists grow up in very different settings and this influences how their childhood and preliminal phases play out. Both Darling and Yolanda are affected by anomalous elements in their country's politics: while Darling is forced to move to a shantytown, Yolanda experiences the dictatorship up close. Gogol, on the other hand, realizes the oddity of his name. Unlike Darling and Yolanda, Gogol is born in the United States and therefore does not experience his preliminal phase in another country. Through analyzing immigration novels with this theoretical framework, the first phase illuminates and contextualizes the life prior to immigration for Darling and Yolanda. In the next chapter the protagonists' liminal phases are elaborated on in order to shed light on various kinds of immigrant experiences in the United States.

Chapter 2 - The "Nowhere" Protagonists

He's a real nowhere man /

Sitting in his nowhere land /

Making all his nowhere plans for nobody /

Doesn't have a point of view /

Knows not where he's going to (Lennon).[15]

This chapter focuses on how the three protagonists' immigrant experiences are portrayed in what I argue are their liminal phases, which is a time when the protagonists are in-between identities and try to find out who they are in the United States. The challenges that the protagonists experience during this phase have to do with a sense of belonging, socialization, and assimilation. Due to the fact that the protagonists have very different backgrounds and departure points, their in-between phases are not identical. In the discussion that follows, the liminal phase is explored both as a spatial and a structural dimension, shedding light on various aspects of the protagonists' liminal phases.

Hazel Andrew and Les Roberts write in their introduction to the book *Liminal Landscapes* that "the liminal already in some way connotes the *spatial*: a boundary, border, a transitional *landscape*" (1: original emphasis). The idea that a place can be liminal is also found in Nyatetũ-Waigwa's *The Liminal Novel*. In her chapter "The Concept of Place" liminality is written about "with a sense of geographical, cultural, and sociopolitical location" (Nyatetũ-Waigwa 15). When Nyatetũ-Waigwa analyzes *The Dark Child* by Camara Laye, she

[15] The quotation of The Beatles' song *The Nowhere Man* is inspired by Asha Choubey, who has included the first three lines of this song in her article "Jhumpa Lahiri's Gogol: in Search of Identity for the Nowhere Man."

distinguishes between various settings which she either categorizes as liminal or non-liminal in relation to the colonial world (28). These are the settings that surround the protagonist when he grows up. While for instance the village Tindican is a setting which Nyatetũ-Waigwa categorizes as "the antiliminal place," representing the old and traditional, the town Kouroussa is described as "the ultimate metaphor of liminality in this novel," because it is geographically "on the border between the old and the new" (Nyatetũ-Waigwa 29, 32).

I have chosen to extend Nyatetũ-Waigwa's use of spatial liminality both thematically and theoretically for my discussion. Thematically our focus is different, because while she writes on the colonial novel genre, this thesis is about immigrant novels. Yet, there is a similarity between the two since the protagonists in all the novels are in contact with two cultures: their own and a foreign one. Rather than distinguishing between how places fit within the *rites de passage*, I argue that all the protagonists' surroundings are liminal. With regard to immigration the liminal phase fits well as it can describe how the protagonists have neither any sense of home nor any sense of belonging. During the liminal phase, one is structurally outside society, in-between identities. This resonates with Augé's "non-place," which is a term he uses to describe places where one is in transit, such as the motorway and the airport. Let us remember that "non-place" is a space that "cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity" (Augé 63). Both the liminal and "non-place" therefore have to do with a transition and speak to the liminal phase.

Furthermore, with regards to spatial liminal dimensions, Bjørn Thomassen suggests that one should distinguish between three different kinds where the liminal phase can occur: "specific places" such as a doorway, "areas or zones" for example a border between two countries and "countries or larger regions" ("Revisiting Liminality" 26). In this chapter, the United States as a "country or larger region" will be viewed as a liminal place, and discussed in its instance as a "non-place" for the three protagonists Gogol, Yolanda and Darling.

Gogol's Liminal Phase

Let us return to Gogol: in the previous chapter we left him in the graveyard where he realized the oddity of his name. As we all know, a name is a crucial part of our own identity and when meeting other people, one of the first things we ask is "what is your name?" We all have names in order to be distinguished from each other, and according to Clifford Geertz naming is a means of changing "anybodies" into "somebodies" (363). As Geertz points out, the idea of being "somebody" is of universal concern and this is also reflected in literature. The name "Gogol" should then, following Geertz, convert the protagonist from an "anybody" to a "somebody." But for Gogol, the exact opposite has happened in the preliminal phase: he has gone from being a "somebody" to an "anybody" because he no longer feels a connection to his name. Due to the fact that his preliminal phase only is a moment, it has trigged his entry into the liminal phase as an "anybody."

Gogol and Spatial Liminality

During Gogol's liminal phase the detachment from his own name, and thereby his sense of self, can be spatially construed into "non-place" because he no longer identifies with neither his American nor his Bengali cultural background, thereby occupying a space which is non-relational to any sense of himself (cf. Augé). I argue that the United States is a "non-place" for the three protagonists, and, in addition, India is also this for Gogol. When Ashoke has a sabbatical, the Gangulis spend 8 months in India and during their time there Gogol feels detached from both his relatives and surroundings. This lack of belonging is apparent when Gogol is in Calcutta, a place he has been many times before, but "has no sense of direction" (Lahiri *The Namesake.* 83). Thus, while Gogol is in his liminal phase all his surroundings are "non-places."

The Ambiguity of the Name "Gogol"

In the liminal phase one becomes "ambiguous, neither here nor there, betwixt and between all fixed points of classification; [one] passes through a symbolic domain that has few or none of the attributes of his past or coming state" (Turner "Passages, Margins and Poverty" 232). The "past" is childhood, while "the coming state" is the new self after re-incorporation, which is the final phase of the *rites de passage*.[16] Thus, during this phase the individual is "structurally, if not physically, 'invisible'" because one is "at once *no longer* classified *and not* yet classified" (Turner "Betwixt and Between" 511: original emphasis). In addition, during the liminal phase, one is not considered as part of society, rather one is within the "anti-structure" (Turner "Liminal to Liminoid" 76). Structurally, then, Gogol is unclassifiable outside of the structures of society in-between the two identities of his past childhood and his future adulthood identity.

Just like in the preliminal moment, the name "Gogol" continues to be ambiguous for Gogol during his liminal phase: "He hates that his name is both absurd and obscure, that it has nothing to do with who he is, that it is neither Indian nor American but of all things Russian. He hates having to live with it, with a pet name turned good name, day after day, second after second" (Lahiri *The Namesake.* 76). The name is incongruous to him as it relates to no part of himself and rather is "of all things Russian." Thus, as we know, with the entrance into the *rites of passage* Gogol's sense of identity is unraveled and it becomes apparent that he consists of three distinct parts: his Bengali heritage, the American life he lives and the name of a Russian author. The hatred for his own name escalates when he learns more about the author. His namesake's first name is not even Gogol; rather, it is his last name. Furthermore, in high school he learns that the author Nikolai Gogol was a man on "a steady decline into madness," who was a "hypochondriac and a deeply paranoid, frustrated man," with "fits of

[16] This third and final phase of the *rites de passage* is the focus of Chapter Three.

severe depression," who had "trouble making friends," and who "died a virgin" (Lahiri *The Namesake.* 91). The new information about his namesake adds to his own sense of liminality as it detaches him even further from feeling an attachment to the name and a sense of who he is. Thus, his name becomes a symbol of that which is impossible to unite, and the feeling of not belonging anywhere: he is a "nowhere man" in a "nowhere land."

The Name Change and the Attempted Hybrid Identity

Gogol's solution to his sense of liminality is to change his name. Before he starts University, he decides to take the name "Nikhil," which his parents attempted to give him as a good name when he started kindergarten. In the previous chapter we saw that this name is a "respectable Bengali good name, meaning "he who is entire, encompassing all"" (Lahiri *The Namesake.* 56). Furthermore, it can be Americanized into "Nick," and still relates him to his namesake Nikolai Gogol. With this name change, Gogol feels he goes through a "legal rite of passage" (Lahiri *The Namesake.* 102), and I argue that Gogol attempts to create a "hybrid identity" within his liminal phase.

As we saw in the introductory chapter, Homi Bhabha writes that in order to create a hybrid identity, which is the merging of two cultures, one needs to enter an "interstitial passage" called "the third space" (Bhabha "Introduction: Locations of Culture" 5). This space "opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha "Introduction: Locations of Culture" 5). According to Bhabha, hybridity is a kind of translation where the traces of the past cultures' feelings and practices are present. This translation is twofold, as two processes happen at the same time: firstly, an alienation from the anterior cultures occurs and, secondly, an imitation of the anterior cultures happens (Bhabha "The Third Space, Interview with Homi Bhabha" 210). Therefore with the translation, the third space "gives rise to something different, something

new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (Bhabha "The Third Space, Interview with Homi Bhabha" 211). The third space, then, is a creative space within liminality where cultures are merged and translated in order to form one hybrid identity.

Gogol's two anterior cultures, the Bengali and the American, should then - if following Bhabha's concept of hybridity – translate into an identity which emerges from the two sides of him, making him the one who "encompasses all" in the "third space." The new name is therefore a means of ending his constant questioning of his own fragmented identity, as well as getting rid of a name he has "always hated" (Lahiri *The Namesake.* 102). With the new name he rather wants to emerge from former and different cultural spaces with a hybrid identity, where he is a cohesive and whole self.

As Nikhil, Gogol feels a new kind of liberty he has never experienced before. With this freedom, he dares to do things he has never done previously: "[i]t is as Nikhil, that first semester, that he grows a goatee, starts smoking Camel Lights at parties … It is as Nikhil that he loses his virginity at a party at Ezra Stiles, with a girl wearing a plaid woolen skirt and combat boots and mustard tights" (Lahiri *The Namesake.* 105). Furthermore, it is as Nikhil, that he has long-term relationships with the American girls Ruth and Maxine. However, the wish to inhabit a third space and be a person "who encompasses all," does not work for Gogol. In order to have this kind of identity, one must, according to Bhabha, leave the previous cultures behind when one is within the "third space," since they are meant to be "prior only in the sense of being anterior" (Bhabha "The Third Space, Interview with Homi Bhabha" 211). In Gogol's case he does not manage to translate into a hybrid identity because in his surroundings there are people who still revoke his feelings related to his anterior Bengali culture.

In fact, Gogol rather becomes fragmented. The scholar Asha Choubey writes, "Nikhil and Gogol gradually come to represent two separate spaces that Gogol seems to occupy" (5). Gogol himself comments on this sense of dividedness: "At times he feels as if he's cast himself in a play, acting the part of twins, indistinguishable to the naked eye yet fundamentally different" (Lahiri *The Namesake.* 105). The duality of his own identity is evident – two completely different and contrasting cultures make him the second-generation Bengali immigrant in the United States that he is. Not only is Gogol within the liminal phase in-between two versions of his identity (childhood and adulthood) but he is also fragmented with the two parts of him, as outlined above. Thus, although Gogol attempts to enter Bhabha's "third space," he rather occupies two spaces of anteriority: the Bengali Gogol and the American Nikhil. The division of the self therefore undermines the concept of hybridity, working instead exactly against the meaning of the name "Nikhil" and fragmenting further.

The fact that Gogol has a fragmented identity is something that he reflects a lot on during his liminal. In fact, according to Turner, contemplation is a very common throughout the liminal phase because the individuals in this phase are:

> divested of their previous habits of thought, feeling and action. During the liminal period neophytes are alternately forced and encouraged to think about their society, their cosmos and the powers that generate and sustain them. Liminality may be partly described as a stage of reflection. ("Betwixt and Between" 520)

Aware of his dual identity, Gogol thinks about his identity, society, and his fragmentation: "He is aware that his parents, and their friends, and the children of their friends, and all his own friends from high school, will never call him anything but Gogol. He will remain Gogol during holidays and in summer; Gogol will revisit him on each of his birthdays" (Lahiri *The*

Namesake. 103). In addition, he knows that when he returns back home to his parents, "[s]omewhere along the two-and-a-half-hour journey, Nikhil evaporates and Gogol claims him again" (Lahiri *The Namesake.* 106). Thus while he is among family and Bengali friends his anterior Bengali self reappears.

Another incident, which shows to the reflective quality of Gogol's liminal phase is when he attends a panel discussion about Indian novels. I quote at length, as it is an important moment:

> Gogol is bored by the panelists, who keep referring to something called "marginality," as if it were some sort of medical condition. For most of the hour, he sketches portraits of the panelists, who sit hunched over their papers along a rectangular table. "Telelogically speaking, ABCDs are unable to answer the question 'Where are you from?'" the sociologist on the panel declares. Gogol has never heard the term *ABCD.* He eventually gathers that it stands for "American-born confused deshi." In other words, him. He learns that the *C* could also stand for "conflicted." He knows that *deshi,* a generic word for "countryman," means "Indian," knows that his parents and all their friends always refer to India simply as *desh.* But Gogol never thinks of India as desh. He thinks of it as Americans do, as India. (Lahiri *The Namesake.* 118)

In this excerpt, the presence of Gogol's two cultures is very clear. Although admitting that he is an "ABCD," he does not completely fit the label: because he "never thinks of India as desh." Furthermore, his reaction to the discussion illustrates the impossibility of him being in the "third space" since his two cultures are not "prior only in the sense of being anterior" (Bhabha "The Third Space, Interview with Homi Bhabha" 211). Rather, they are still present in his life, as there is a hierarchy between his two anterior cultures: his American culture is

more prominent than his Bengali side. During Gogol's liminal phase, then, the failure of assuming a new, hybrid identity with the name Nikhil gives Gogol a non-cohesive-identity, or in Geertz and Augé's terminology, it makes him an "anybody" in a "non-place."

While Gogol's liminal phase is an *abstract separation* from the previous version of himself, the two other protagonists experience a *physical separation*. According to Turner, the liminal phase can include a "physical separation of the ritual subjects from the rest of society" and for Darling and Yolanda this separation occurs when they move from their homeland to the United States ("Liminal to Liminoid" 58). Additionally, as shown above, the liminal phase is a time when one "has few or none of the attributes of [one's] past or coming state" (Turner "Passages, Margins and Poverty" 232). As already mentioned, I argue that the United States is a "non-place" for the protagonists with few "attributes" (cf. Turner) from neither Yolanda nor Darling's previous life, which is something Darling is very aware of during her liminal phase.

Darling's Liminal Phase

As we saw in Chapter One, Darling's long preliminal phase takes place in the Zimbabwean shantytown Paradise, which is full of hardships and poverty. Ellah Allfrey summarizes this time of her life well: "These are serious times, and while there is play and laughter, too, the harsh realities of empty stomachs, fractured families and social decay are never far away" (Allfrey). Darling is brought to the United States by her aunt Fostalina and during her new liminal life in Detroit, Darling is unaccustomed to her new surroundings.

"Destroyedmichygen" as "Non-Place"

Already at the onset of Darling's stay in the United States her surroundings are "non-places." The first chapter where Darling is in Detroit, or "Destroyedmichygen," as she calls it, begins with the following:

> If you come here where I am standing and look outside the window, you will not see any men seated under a blooming jacaranda playing draughts. Bastard and Stina and Godknows and Chipo and Sbho will not be calling me off to Budapest. You will not even hear a vendor singing her wares, and you will not see anyone playing country-game or chasing after flying ants. Some things happen only in my country, and *this here is not my country; I don't know whose it is*. (Bulawayo *WNNN* 147: emphasis added)

In this excerpt, Darling compares her new surroundings with her old, and, as we shall see later on in this chapter, this is something that occurs throughout the rest of *We Need New Names.* For Darling, Detroit is not anything like her country: neither the people she knows, nor the landscape she is used to, are seen outside.

Even though Darling is surrounded by unknown settings in Detroit, she initially hopes and expects that they won't continue to be so and she therefore perceives her "non-places" as temporary. It is winter when Darling arrives in Detroit and unaccustomed to snow, she hopes to see a known and familiar landscape when it melts: "Maybe I will finally see things that I know, and maybe this place will look ordinary at last. I will go out there and smell the air, maybe catch some grasshoppers and find out what kind of strange fruits grow on all these big trees" (Bulawayo *WNNN* 159). With the move to the United States, Darling has been "physically separated" from the known and is in a place that has none of the Zimbabwean "attributes" of her past (cf. Turner). The fact that snow is a new "attribute" exaggerates the unrecognizable "non-place" that Detroit is for Darling because an unknown weather phenomenon covers her new surroundings. For Darling the snow can therefore be perceived

as abject and “matter out of place” in the sense that is an obstacle that covers the supposed known and familiar.

However, this lack of ordinariness in the landscape is not only found in her new neighborhood but also in other places Darling visits. On their way to a wedding, her expectations once more fill her with hope:

> [W]e’re just driving between stretches and stretches of maize fields, which make me keep expecting to see hoers bent double, tilling; boys walking in front of ox-drawn plows, leading the oxen, the sounds of their whistles and cracking whips in the air, hoes hitting the earth, voices of women urging one another with song. There are always moments like this, where it almost looks like the familiar things from back home will just come out of nowhere, like ghosts. (Bulawayo *WNNN* 163-64)

Darling lives in a constant ghostlike “non-place” where the things around her “almost” remind her of the known. This sense of the “almost” is important as Detroit not only becomes an unfamiliar place for Darling but also a kind of place which I call “phantom-place.” According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a phantom is something that is “merely apparent, illusory, imaginary” and “that merely resembles, in form or appearance some other thing” ("Phantom"). I argue that Darling’s surroundings have these functions as she constantly expects to see physical materializations of the memories she has from her beloved Paradise appear (“like ghosts”). The settings that Darling is situated in are therefore “almost” but not quite what she is used to and therefore ghost-like as they remind her of her past life. These places are therefore what once was but no longer is for her, as she lives a new life in the United States.

Darling's new surroundings are also a "non-place" in the way she initially pronounces Detroit, Michigan ("Destroyedmichygen"). Through the choice of names for the various settings, Bulawayo juxtaposes Darling's new home in Detroit with the old home in the shantytown Paradise. I suggest that "Destroyedmichygen" mirrors the fragmentation that Darling experiences by moving there, away from her precious Paradise. These two places are complete opposites: Paradise depicts the perfect and ideal place to live that Darling pictures her past to be. Detroit, or rather "Destroyedmichygen, on the other hand, denotes the broken and demolished where Darling's American dream has fallen apart and has been demolished.[17] Later in the novel, Darling moves to Kalamazoo and this name is also interesting as one of its etymologies is "mirage" (Rzepczynski). According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, mirage can be "an illusion or fantasy, something that appears real or possible but is not in fact so" ("Mirage"). Kalamazoo, then, can be understood as an illusory place that does not exist. Similarly to "Destroyedmichygen," Kalamazoo has a brutal and negative connotation, adding to the stark contrast between the idealized Paradise and the United States.

Darling, the Socially Dead Illegal Immigrant

As we saw illustrated with Darling's sick father, the liminal phase is a time when people are metaphorically "dead to the social world, but alive to the asocial world" (Turner "Liminal to Liminoid" 59). This happens to Darling because she is detached from her friends and family: "With time I stopped writing altogether. I just started putting it off, telling myself I'd write tomorrow, next week, in a couple of weeks, I'd write in a month, I'd write soon, and that was it, before I knew it I'd lost touch. But it didn't mean I'd forgotten about them" (Bulawayo *WNNN* 188). The "social world" that she had in Paradise is far away and by stopping to keep in touch, she is socially dead in relation to them, a thought which Darling also has later in the

[17] Incidentally, Detroit in real life is a place which has declined from being a metropolis into a bankrupt city (Padnani).

novel. In Paradise, Chipo has named her daughter "Darling," and Darling thinks that the reasoning behind this is so that "there would be another Darling in case something happened to me in America. It's kind of cute, but I don't know how to feel about it, somebody being named after me *like I'm dead or something*" (Bulawayo *WNNN* 210: emphasis added). In a way, the physical separation, which has occurred between Darling and her friends, has made her dead both liminally (because she is socially dead to them), and physically, because she no longer is in Paradise.

Darling is also an illegal immigrant and this gives her an ambiguous status within the society and nation state. In other words, she is a "matter out of place" within the American system. When Darling moved to Detroit, she entered with a visitor's visa, which after a few months expires. If she were to leave, she would not be able to return to the United States. Darling is therefore a "nowhere person" living in a "nowhere land" and as we shall see below, she continues her liminal life in the United States living in-between her present and her past life.

Stage of Reflection: Betwixt and Between the Past and the Future

Previously in the chapter, we saw that the liminal phase is "partly described as a stage of reflection" where one "is encouraged to think about [one's] society" (Turner "Betwixt and Between" 520). In *We Need New Names* the chapters situated in the United States are indeed chapters of reflection for Darling: At times she reflects about her current life in the United States and rejects it, and at other times she reminisces about her past life in Paradise. Darling's reflections are emotional and they are mirrored in the connotations of the settings' names.

During her "interstitial time" in Paradise Darling envisioned how life in the United States would be, but her imagined "My America" does not correspond to how it turns out to

be. In fact she reflects that, “this place doesn’t look *like my America*” and does “not *feel like My America*” (Bulawayo *WNNN* 150, 188: emphasis added). There is thus a big divide between the expected life and the real life Darling leads in Detroit and later in Kalamazoo. Darling is “destroyed” and broken in Detroit and moves on to Kalamazoo a place which among other things means “mirage” (Rzepczynski). As shown above, one of the definitions of mirage is: “an illusion or fantasy” that seems real but is not ("Mirage"). In fact, the United States turns out to be a mirage for Darling as nothing turns out the way she expected. Thus, the United States as “non-place” is achieved through both the literal meanings of the place names and through Darling’s rejection of her life there, a sentiment that she continues to have throughout the rest of the novel.

Later on in the novel, Darling is older and works during the summer, in order to save money for community college. Although some years have passed, she still expresses the disappointment with the life she leads in the United States: “When I’m not working at the store, I have to come here, even though I don’t like the idea of cleaning somebody’s house, of picking up after someone else, because in my head *this is not what I came to America for*” (Bulawayo *WNNN* 263: emphasis added). Darling’s envisioned “America” is still with her and therefore she cannot come to terms with how different her life has turned out to be.

Darling’s idealized Paradise, on the other hand, is a setting which is reminisced about in an exclusively positive manner. In the United States, Darling compares her surroundings to her past life in her idealized Paradise. These comparisons occur in various contexts for instance when she is in a car, talks to others or sees clothes that remind her of home. For instance, in the beginning of the novel while Darling is still in Paradise, her friend Bastard wears “a faded orange T-shirt that says Cornell” (Bulawayo *WNNN* 12). Later on in the novel, when Darling is in the United States, this t-shirt is once more seen, this time worn by an American, which makes Darling think that this girl “is wearing Bastard’s Cornell shirt”

(Bulawayo *WNNN* 267). Therefore almost anything, material or non-material can make her reminisce about the past. Furthermore, her reflections are dream-like and make her imagine about her beloved Paradise. One example is when Darling hears her friends on the phone and she begins to think and reflect about what she would do if she were home:

> Time dissolves like we are in a movie scene and I have maybe entered the telephone and traveled through the lines to go home. I've never left, and I'm ten again and we are playing country-game and Find bin Laden and Andy-over. We're teasing Godknows for his peeking buttocks, we're watching a fight, we're imitating the church people, we're watching somebody get buried. We're hungry but we're together and we're at home and everything is sweeter than dessert. (Bulawayo *WNNN* 205-06)

This is an excerpt, in fact one of many, where Darling thinks back to her life in Paradise. The tone here is one of longing and she mentions games and people who pertain to her past and the place which is not a "non-place" for her. Although her past was filled with poverty and hardships, she only reflects positively on this life compared to how she thinks about her so-called "America," as exemplified above. Darling is constantly "betwixt and between" (cf. Turner) two different cultures and lives liminally and temporally trapped in-between the idealized past in Paradise and the future oriented "My America."

"Home-home" is where the Heart is[18]

With regards to a sense of home, in Darling's mind she has only had two: "There are two homes inside my head: home before Paradise, and home in Paradise; home one and home two" (Bulawayo *WNNN* 191). What is notable is that the United States is not mentioned at all

[18] "home-home" (Bulawayo *WNNN* 220)

and this adds to the sense of the United States as a "non-place." In fact, Darling never accepts her life there as home: "In America, roads are like the devil's hands, like God's love, reaching all over, just the sad thing is, they won't really take me home" (Bulawayo *WNNN* 191). Despite the fact that she has lived there for some years, she does not acknowledge it as home, and it still continues to be a non-relational "non-place." It is also a place where she is symbolically non-existent in the present since through her continual reflections to the past, Darling is indeed liminal as she does not exist in her present life.

This "non-existence" is also present towards the very end of the novel where Darling tries to cover some writing on the wall with a batik cloth, a mask and a clock: "*it looks complete, but I feel like I'm not* because I'm busy thinking about home and I feel like I can't breathe from missing it. It's a heavy feeling that I know will not go away" (Bulawayo *WNNN* 284: emphasis added). This echoes the liminal juxtaposition that Turner writes about where one is in-between classifications. Furthermore, just like the idea of the "phantom place" where things around Darling are "almost" but not quite, she also *is but is not quite* present in her life during her life in the United States, as she rather lives through the memories of her past. This is unlike Yolanda's liminal phase, as we shall see below.

Yolanda's Liminal Phase

When she is very young, Yolanda and her family flee from the Trujillo dictatorship and his secret police in the Dominican Republic by exiling to the United States. Both Darling and Yolanda's entrance into the liminal phase coincides with them arriving to the United States. Ideally for Yolanda she should assimilate into the American culture because she arrives there at such a young age, but this does not happen. Instead, Yolanda is stuck in the liminal phase as she is linguistically and discursively framed through the English language as a "matter out of place" in the United States. In addition, this new country is a place where she cannot relate

to her surroundings and it therefore is a "non-place" for her. As shown above, the liminal phase is a time when one is "at once *no longer* classified *and not* yet classified" (Turner "Betwixt and Between" 511: original emphasis). Furthermore, Turner writes that liminality "may be *anomie*, alienation, *angst*" ("Liminal to Liminoid" 78: original emphasis). Rather than a lack of classification, Yolanda's liminal phase is filled with an overabundance of classification, which she does not identify with and this generates angst and alienation thereby making her continually liminal, in-between identities.

Yolanda as a Fish out of Water

Already from the onset of Yolanda's life in New York, her surroundings begin to construct her as not belonging. One of the ways this is done is when others call her a "spic," an offensive term for Hispanic Americans (Alvarez 171). This happens both at the Catholic school she attends and in the apartment building where she lives, and therefore both in the public and the private spheres of her life she is verbally abused. With this "ugly" word the children and neighbors categorize the García family into a separate group which differentiates them from everyone else (Alvarez 171). In addition, Yolanda and her sisters are physically abused by other children at school: ""You want us to get killed? Those kids were throwing stones today!"" (Alvarez 135). Thus, during the beginning of Yolanda's life in New York people are hostile and prejudiced towards her family. Yolanda is indeed liminal in her new setting because she is divested from the life she was used to (cf. Turner) and alienated from the people around her.

The attempt to move Yolanda to an all girls' preparatory school in Boston in order to improve her time at school alienates her even further. This is done with the intention that Yolanda and her sisters can meet proper behaving Americans. But the other girls attending this school are from rich families and there is therefore a huge social divide: "we met the right

kind of Americans all right, but they didn't exactly mix with us" (Alvarez 108). The sisters therefore see themselves as "fish out of water" (Alvarez 108). This idiom is important as it signifies Yolanda's whole situation in the United States. Like the fish, Yolanda is a "matter out of place" in a "non-place" far away from her right element the Dominican Republic. She is, rather, a liminal protagonist living in a hostile and inhospitable country, trying to survive. Given that Yolanda finds both the people in the United States and the country itself "inhospitable," the language becomes her solace: "she needed to settle somewhere, and since the natives were unfriendly, and the country inhospitable, she took root in the language" (Alvarez 141). However, as we shall see below the language and the fact that she is an immigrant continues to make her a liminal outsider.

The Foreigner at College

During college, I argue that Yolanda continues to experience no sense of belonging in the United States. After having been in the United States for a couple of years, Yolanda and her sisters claim to be "*more* than adjusted," as they feel that they have been integrated into the culture, learnt the language, and therefore find that their country of origin is "old hat" (Alvarez 109, 108: original emphasis). This idea that she is well adjusted follows Yolanda when she a few years later attends college: "I had been pretty well Americanized since our arrival in this country a decade before" (Alvarez 87). However, although she claims to be Americanized, her experiences at college still mark her as a "greenhorn," thereby indicating otherwise (Alvarez 90). "The Rudy Elmenhurst Story" chapter is particularly revealing in this respect.

When Yolanda attends an English class at college, even the English language, which Yolanda "takes root in," linguistically frames her as "matter out of place." As Yolanda is an

immigrant, there are certain things that she as a foreigner has not understood about the English language, and one example of this is the name Rudolf Brodermann Elmenhurst. When hearing this name, Yolanda goes by the sound, which she admits is "an *immigrant's failing, literalism*. I assumed he was late because he'd just whizzed in from his small barony somewhere in Austria" (Alvarez 89: emphasis added). There is a linguistic boundary between Yolanda and the native speakers: she understands and perceives the name by its literal meaning and not that it only is an extravagant name. This boundary is also apparent when Yolanda herself speaks English, as she wishes she could "say things like "no shit," *without feeling like I was imitating someone else*" (Alvarez 95: emphasis added). The idea of imitating the language hints to the fact that Yolanda still is a fish out of water. In this excerpt, the sense of not belonging is very evident, as Yolanda does not feel comfortable saying a phrase that is common among teenagers. Linguistically, then, as English is not Yolanda's mother tongue; she is not "rooted" in the language.

Although Yolanda claims to be pretty much Americanized, people around her continue to create a boundary between themselves and her. During the first English class in college, the row call of the students once more distinguishes Yolanda from the others:

> He called roll, acknowledging most of the other students with nicknames and jokes and remarks, stumbling over my name and smiling falsely at me, a smile I had identified as one flashed on "foreign students" to show them the natives were friendly. I felt profoundly *out of place*. (Alvarez 88-89: emphasis added)

Even though Yolanda has lived in the United States for more than a decade and claims to be well adjusted, the reality is that she is singled out as a "foreign student." In addition, her name adds to this gap between herself and the other students, as it is different. This excerpt shows

how Yolanda acknowledges that she feels "out of place" evoking Douglas's concept of "matter out of place." Let us remember that the liminal phase is a time when one is outside the structures of society and this is the case with regard to Yolanda, as she does not feel part of the English class, but rather as an anomalous immigrant.

The theme of being linguistically framed as "Other" is noticeable in the way Rudy tells his parents that he is dating Yolanda: "He had told them he was seeing "a Spanish girl," and he reported they said that should be interesting for him to find out about people from other cultures" (Alvarez 98). This idea that Rudy calls Yolanda a "Spanish girl" is interesting, as it echoes the "fantasy heritage." This term originates from Carey McWilliams' book *North from Mexico* (1949) where he describes how Mexican Americans proudly accentuated part of their identity and suppressed the rest of it. In the book *Dictionary of Latino Civil Rights History*, F. Arturo Rosales has written a summary of the concept:

> Mexican Americans highlighted the Spanish background of the Southwest and their own identity while ignoring or hiding their Mexican, mestizo, or Amerindian heritage and/or identity, because being Spanish was more socially acceptable in a racist United States. The "fantasy heritage" emphasized that families of the old Southwest were of pure Spanish heritage, unlike the mixed-race people of later immigrant generations. (163)

When Rudy tells his parents that he is dating a "Spanish girl," he applies the fantasy heritage to Yolanda by covering the fact that she is from the Dominican Republic. By doing this, Rudy is racist towards Yolanda because her true cultural identity is hidden away, as if she really was "matter out of place" due to her Dominican nationality. In this example, Yolanda again experiences yet another categorization as "Other." At college, then, Yolanda continues to

experience a repeated linguistic framing as different from Americans, both through the way she herself talks and thinks about the English language, as well as from the people surrounding her who construct her as anomalous in the United States.

"She wants to be Called Yolanda Now"

Similarly to Gogol, Yolanda is fragmented into various parts. However, hers is a different kind, as she is not, like Gogol, given two names but rather many nicknames throughout her life. These nicknames are American as well as ones given to her by her Dominican family: "Yolanda, nicknamed *Yo* in Spanish, misunderstood *Joe* in English, doubled and pronounced like the toy, *Yoyo* – or when forced to select from a rack of personalized key chains, *Joey*" (Alvarez 68: original emphasis). As we saw in the previous chapter, Gogol also does not manage to find his name on key chains. With all these nicknames, Yolanda is fragmented into various identities. Joan M. Hoffman outlines nicely how the nicknames:

> act to properly define and name the many diverse facets of her complex personality. There is "Yolanda" – the "pure, mouth-filling, full-blooded name" (81) properly pronounced "Jo-laahn-da" – which communicates her rich Spanish heritage (47). This is a name and a heritage that should inspire only pride, according to a kindly teacher during her first year in the United States (166): but she is also the childish Yoyo, the Americanized Joe or Joey, Jolinda for those who can't spell, and finally the forceful and to-the-point Yo. (How the García Girls Lost Their Accents qtd. in Hoffman 23)

All these nicknames make Yolanda into an ambiguous character fragmented into various parts. Interestingly, "yo" means "I" in Spanish and the choice of name for the protagonist

cannot be coincidental. It is exactly the "yo," in this case the name, which becomes foreign to Yolanda when she suffers a mental breakdown and her parents therefore check her into a small private facility where a doctor can make "her one whole Yolanda" (Alvarez 80). Just like in Gogol's case, then, Yolanda's name adds to her being in-between identities when her name no longer feels like her own. The yearning to be "one whole Yolanda" is present in her life even when she recovers. An example is when her sister Sandi calls her "Yo," and Carla corrects her and says, ""She wants to be called Yolanda now."" Yolanda, on the other hand, answers, "What do you mean, *wants to be called Yolanda now?* That's my name, you know?"" (Alvarez 61: original emphasis). Thus for Yolanda there is a continual struggle with regard to her name and thereby also her identity. Yolanda's liminal phase, then, occurs because the people surrounding her linguistically frame her as anomalous in society. Furthermore, she herself experiences being a fish out of water with regard to the English language and to her own sense of self.

In this section of the chapter, I have explored how the three protagonists' liminal phases highlight immigrant experiences when arriving to a new country and they differ vastly from each other: Gogol's liminal phase is very personal and has to do with his self-identity, Yolanda's is both personal, like Gogol's, but also has to do with how other people view her as a "matter out of place," and Darling's has to with her new spatial surroundings. Furthermore, in all the three novels there is an expectation that the feeling of being in-between identities only is temporary. Gogol thinks that his name change is his *rites de passage*, Darling expects to see the known landscape when the snow disappears, and Yolanda's goal is to become American. This points to the fact that the liminal phase is meant to be temporary, and whether or not this is the case for the three protagonists is examined in the next chapter.

Let us remember that the liminal phase is "outside of time," but the protagonists are also in the "non-place" in the sense that they do not relate to the United States as home. In

what follows I explore how this place, which has no affiliation to the protagonists' sense of self, is the setting where communitas and its transformative bond takes place.

Communitas

As we have seen previously in this chapter, the liminal phase is an "anti-structure," which means that all liminars are equal because hierarchy does not exist during this in-between phase (cf.Turner). It is during this time of equality that communitas occurs. According to Turner, communitas "is a transformative experience that goes to the root of each person's being and finds in that root something profoundly communal and shared" (*The Ritual Process* 138). This mutual bonding has a transformative function because "the more spontaneously 'equal' people become, the more distinctively 'themselves' they become; the more the *same* they become socially, the less they find themselves to be individually" (Turner "Liminal to Liminoid" 78: original emphasis). Turner is very vague with regard to how communitas is transformative, but I understand it to mean that by regarding each other as equal the limininars experience a transformation, as one no longer focuses on the self but rather the community. This quality of change is present in all of the three types of communitas that Turner distinguishes between: "*existential* or *spontaneous,*" "*normative*" and "*ideological*" communitas (*The Ritual Process* 132: original emphasis).[19] While existential communitas occurs outside the structures of society, the other two forms are within the structures of society. This is because "[c]ommunitas itself soon develops a structure, in which free relationships between individuals become converted into norm-governed relationships

[19] The first kind of communitas has two names as they both indicate how communitas can happen spontaneously in an existential mode. I have chosen to apply the term existential communitas in this thesis because the discussion is about the protagonists' shared existential experience with other characters, and the term is also more suitable as it relates directly to the protagonists' identities.

between social personae" (Turner *The Ritual Process* 132). In what follows, the two first kinds of communitas are discussed with regard to the three protagonists.

Existential Communitas

Both Gogol and Darling experience existential communitas, which occurs spontaneously wherever and whenever to whomever is in their liminal phase (Turner "Variations" 46). Gogol shares these spontaneous moments with both his sister Sonia and his wife Moushumi but at different times in his life. During their childhood, Gogol and Sonia share a mutual understanding, as they both have to deal with their Bengali and American cultures. According to Turner, existential communitas are moments where one "feel[s] that it is important to relate directly to another person … free from the culturally defined encumbrances of his role, status, reputation, class, caste, sex, or other structural niche" (Turner "Liminal to Liminoid" 79). This relatability is especially evident during the Ganguli family's trips to India where the children are more attached to American culture than their Bengali heritage. During their time there, they both miss among other things American food: "From time to time, they privately admit to excruciating cravings, for hamburgers or a slice of pepperoni pizza or a cold glass of milk" (Lahiri *The Namesake.* 84). However, Gogol and Sonia's moments of existential communitas only occur during their childhood because, as they grow older in the novel, Sonia does not seem to have a problematic relationship with her dual identity.

As for Gogol's adult life, Moushumi and he experience moments of existential communitas throughout their relationship because their dual identities connect them to each other, as they both differ from the people that surround them. It is my opinion that Moushumi is also within a liminal phase because she, just like Gogol, has a fragmented identity that places her in-between identities because her parents are Bengali and she has grown up in both England and the United States. Similarly to Gogol, she has experienced trouble with her

name. During an evening where names are discussed among American friends, Gogol realizes that neither his nor Moushumi's name is in any of the baby name books: "Both Gogol and Moushumi are absent from these books, and for the first time all evening he feels a hint of that odd bond that had first drawn them together" (Lahiri *The Namesake.* 240). This "odd bond" can be viewed as a moment of their existential communitas, generated by a mutual understanding that their names and identities are different from their American friends. Furthermore, they experience communitas through their similar appearance: "They talk about how they are both routinely assumed to be Greek, Egyptian, Mexican – even in this misrendering they are joined" (Lahiri *The Namesake.* 212). As Turner writes, it is during existential communitas that people "relate directly" to each other and this is what happens between Moushumi and Gogol as they are "joined" and have a mutual "bond" during their liminal phases. This only occurs between the two of them and not with the other people surrounding them, but their existential communitas ends when they get divorced and towards the end of the novel Gogol is alone in his liminal phase.

Similarly to Gogol, Darling experiences moments of existential communitas during her life in the United States, as she feels a connection to other Zimbabwean immigrant characters she is acquainted with. Three of these characters are given the familial names Uncle Themba, Aunt Welcome and Aunt Chenia, even though Darling is not related to any of them. In fact, two of these names add to the idea of communitas: the Shona male name Themba means "trust" ("Zimbabwean Shona Names"), while the name Welcome connotes inclusivity and hospitality. The names both indicate equality and therefore signify community. When Aunt Fostalina invites them and others over, they make Zimbabwean food and sing and dance to music from their homeland. During one of these occasions, Darling thinks that: "the reason they are my relatives now is they are from my country too – it's like

the country has become a real family since we are in America, which is not our country" (Bulawayo *WNNN* 161).

Darling experiences communitas with the people from Zimbabwe whom she views as her "real family" because they can relate to each other in a communal culture outside the structures of their new country. These gatherings exemplify what the sociologist Tony Blackshaw writes about existential communitas, as they are moments of "an explicit, total and authentic coming together of a social group" (114). In fact, these gatherings with other Zimbabweans are for Darling "[t]he onliest time that it's almost interesting here" (Bulawayo *WNNN* 160). As we saw previously in this chapter, Darling rejects life in the United States, and the Zimbabwean gatherings seem to be the only moments she in fact embraces. For Darling, then, existential communitas occurs in short moments with other Zimbabwean immigrants and evokes her beloved homeland.

Normative Communitas

Unlike Gogol and Darling, I argue that Yolanda experiences normative communitas which is "a subculture which attempts to foster and maintain relationships of spontaneous communitas on a more or less permanent basis" (Turner "Liminal to Liminoid" 80). For Yolanda this unending communitas is shared with her three sisters Carla, Sandra and Sofía. As we saw above, the idea of relating directly to one another is one of the main features of existential communitas and thereby also normative communitas as it is a prolonged version. When the sisters are young, their parents call them "*the four girls*" and Sandra reflects that "they all seemed one organism" (Alvarez 168: original emphasis). This sense that the sisters are a unit is also applicable to their communitas, as they share the same aspirations and goals. Turner writes that normative communitas occurs between people who "feel themselves initially to be utterly vulnerable to the institutionalized groups surrounding them. They develop protective

institutional armor, armor which becomes the harder as the pressures to destroy the primary group's autonomy proportionally increase" (Turner "Liminal to Liminoid" 80). *The four girls'* vulnerability is evident in how they all feel unwelcome in the United States, literally outside the structures of society. This happens to them when they are for instance called "spics." Despite this, they all wish to fit in and are therefore set on a communal goal: "to become Americans" (Alvarez 135). I argue that this communal goal is their way of being within normative communitas as they create a protective armor. In other words, they wish to re-incorporate into society, a term which is discussed in the next chapter. Although most of the novel's chapters focus separately on *the four girls*, the normative communitas they share is permanent both in the United States and in the Dominican Republic. After some years in the United States, *the four girls* differ from their family on the Island, as their aunt Tía Carmen comments on: "'These girls have lived so long away, they have gotten American ways'" (Alvarez 130). It is only *the four girls* who have the same mix of cultures and therefore relate to each other on a personal level with regard to their exile background.

Concluding Remarks

As shown in this chapter, the three protagonists all experience some kind of liminal phase in the United States. Furthermore, during this in-between phase the three protagonists all experience some kind of communitas. In fact, in the three novels the characters that the protagonists experience communitas with are immigrants from the same country as them. However, there is one important aspect of communitas that needs to be further explored: Turner writes that it is a transformative moment, but to what extent is this the case for Darling, Yolanda and Gogol? I suggest that this does not apply to any of the three protagonists since all of them experience it with fellow immigrants with whom they share a culture and heritage. For Darling her communitas is rather a gathering and an experience of a

shared mutual culture with other Zimbabweans, Yolanda shares communitas with her sisters who do not help her to transform at all, and Gogol only shares communitas with second-generation immigrants, who just like him struggle to find out how to accept and live with a fragmented identity. As all the three protagonists experience non-transformative communitas, the question is then: are they able to exit the liminal phase even though they have not been transformed?

Chapter 3 – The Endings of the Protagonists' Stories

"The past was only my cradle, and now it cannot hold me, because I am grown too big" (Antin 364).

> I was born, I have lived, and I have been made over. Is it not time to write my life's story? I am just as much out of the way as if I were dead, for I am absolutely other than the person whose story I have to tell. Physical continuity with my earlier self is no disadvantage. I could speak in the third person and not feel that I was masquerading. I can analyze my subject, I can reveal everything; for *she*, and not *I*, is my real heroine. My life I have still to live; her life ended when mine began. (Antin xi: original emphasis)

Both the excerpts are from Mary Antin's famous immigrant autobiography *The Promised Land* (1912), that tells the story of her move from Polotzk in Belarus to the United States. In her thesis about immigrant autobiographies Christine Steira writes that Antin's literary work "is considered to epitomize the typical immigrant narrative, where the author's own personal transformation and Americanization is a central issue" (7). This book is neither contemporary nor a novel, as my three chosen immigrant novels are, and is rather placed within a time where Americanization was strongly enforced on immigrants who arrived and lived in the United States. Nonetheless, I have chosen to include it, as it is a classic example of re-incorporation.

Re-incorporation is the third and final phase of the *rites de passage* and during this phase one exits the liminal phase and is once more integrated into society. According to Thomassen, this phase can be viewed as a "home-coming": if liminality "can best be captured as a loss of home and a ritualized rupture with the world as we know it, any movement out of liminality must somehow relate to a sort of home-coming, a feeling at home *in* the world and *with* the world, at the levels of both thought and practice" (Thomassen *Liminality and the Modern* 17: original emphasis). Furthermore, Turner writes that the final phase "includes symbolic phenomena and actions which represent the return of the subjects to their new, relatively stable, well-defined position in the total society" ("Liminal to Liminoid" 57). Antin's autobiography is an example of a finished *rites de passage* as there is a clear distinction between the person ("*she"*) she was in Polotzk, and the current person (*"I")* she is after her move to the United States. According to Turner one must during the liminal phase "be a *tabula rasa,* a blank slate, on which is inscribed the knowledge and wisdom of the group, in those respects that pertain to the new status" (Turner *The Ritual Process* 103: original emphasis). In my opinion Antin is indeed a *tabula rasa* as she has given up her Jewish Belarusian identity in order to be fully Americanized. She seems to have re-incorporated into society in that she has been remade ("been made over") after her move to the United States where she can live her American life ("My life I have still to live"). Thus, as the Antin example reflects, in the re-incorporation phase one is no longer "socially dead" and in-between identities, but rather is once again a part of society. Ideally, then, the three immigrant protagonists should exit the liminal phase and thereby be re-incorporated and integrated into the American society.

It is necessary to note that term "re-incorporation" is problematic with regard to my discussion of Yolanda and Darling. This is because, unlike Gogol, they have moved from one place to another and therefore are not able to re-incorporate into the same society. However, it

is important to remember that during the liminal phase the protagonists are outside the structures of society, and with re-incorporation they are incorporated into society. Although this is a different society than the places Darling and Yolanda left, re-incorporation should be understood as a re-entrance into society regardless of where it is. In what follows, I explore whether in the endings of the novels the protagonists are able to re-incorporate, as exemplified with Antin's autobiography above, or if they stay in the liminal phase.

Yolanda: the "Two Endings" of *How the García Girls Lost their Accents*

During Yolanda's liminal phase she is continually construed as a "matter out of place" by the people surrounding her. This section focuses on the "two" endings of *How the García Girls Lost their Accents* and what they indicate with regard to Yolanda's *rites de passage*. I write that there are "two endings," as the introductory and the concluding chapters of the novel are Yolanda's chapters and both function as endings. In "Antojos," the first chapter of the novel, Yolanda is at her oldest in the novel. The final pages of the last chapter, "The Drum," is also an ending because it not only concludes the novel, but also draws together Yolanda's story, as her regressive narration changes from a child's perspective to that of a grown woman.

A So-called Home-coming

In "Antojos" Yolanda visits her family in the Dominican Republic. The Spanish word "*antojo*" is interesting as it means "craving for something you have to eat" (Alvarez 8), and when Yolanda returns to the Island, she craves guavas. At the same time, "*antojo*" can also symbolize Yolanda's innermost physical and mental craving: to find a home and place where she belongs. During her time on the Island, Yolanda realizes that "she has *never felt at home in the States, never*" (Alvarez 12: emphasis added). As an immigrant, Yolanda has on no

occasion felt home in the country where she has lived for many years, and, in other words, admits to the "non-place" the United States is to her.

While on the Island, Yolanda secretly does not know if she will return to the United States and wishes, "[l]et this turn out to be my home" (Alvarez 11). As she does not recognize the United States as a home, she hopes that her motherland will in the end be this for her. Let us remember that, according to Thomassen, in order to emerge from the liminal phase, some sort of "home-coming" with the world must occur. Although Yolanda physically returns to her homeland, this is not a "home-coming" in Thomassen's terms. Just as we saw in the previous chapter, Yolanda continues to be distanced from the people around her. This is apparent in the scene where her own family greets her with the chorus ""Here she comes, Miss America"" (Alvarez 4). Despite the fact that this is meant as a nice gesture, the song differentiates her from the rest of her Dominican family and she is therefore also "matter out of place" within her family.

Not only is Yolanda physically "out of place" on the Island in the "Antojos" chapter, this is also evident with regards to language. During her visit on the Island, Yolanda thinks about what in fact her mother tongue is: "In English or Spanish? she wonders. That poet she met at Lucinda's party the night before argued that no matter how much of it one lost, in the midst of some profound emotion, one would revert to one's mother tongue" (Alvarez 13). Yolanda does not really know which part of herself to identify with and she is still therefore in-between her Dominican and American identity, as she neither is completely Dominican nor American and therefore in both contexts will always feel no sense of belonging.

Although Yolanda has grown up on the Island, her years in the United States have influenced her. As the critic Stephanie Lovelady writes, Yolanda "can be Dominican to a certain extent, but not beyond" (34). The contrast between Yolanda's and her family's ideas is noticeable in the scene where she tells them about her plans of travelling alone on the Island.

When Yolanda says, ""I can't wait to eat some guavas. Maybe I can pick some when I go north in a few days,"" her aunt Flor answers, ""This is not the States … A woman just doesn't travel alone in this country"" (Alvarez 9). An independent woman on the Island does not fit within cultural Dominican ideas and therefore Yolanda differs from her relatives. Regardless of what her family says, Yolanda travels on her own and during this trip, her independence is once more commented on. When she gets a flat tire, José who is in the car with her runs to get help. After José has told a guard about what has happened, the guard remarks "No *dominicana* with a car would be out at this hour getting *guayabas*" (Alvarez 22: original emphasis). Yolanda therefore does not fit within the term "Dominicana" in neither her family nor the guard's eyes.

Thus, Yolanda is physically, linguistically, and culturally "matter out of place" in the Dominican Republic, as she is continually separated from the people surrounding her. It is consequently impossible for her to exit the liminal phase, as re-incorporation is a phase where one experiences, according to Thomassen, a "home-coming." In addition, Turner writes that one has to agree with the world's thought and practices, and as shown above, Yolanda does not agree with the Dominican culture. Similarly to this argument, the critic Cristina Chevereşan claims that, "on the Island [Yolanda] is perceived as alienated 'Other.' Although her blood indissolubly binds her to the community, she is no longer a full-fledged member" (86-87). She, in other words, does not feel any sense of belonging neither in the United States nor on the Island. At the end of the chapter, Yolanda is still in the Dominican Republic driving away in her car from the guava experience.

The Echo of the Past

Yolanda's earliest memory on the Island is recalled in the final chapter "The Drum" and this is an incident where she finds a kitten and takes it away from its mother, even though she

knows and is told by a stranger that ""a kitten belongs with its mother, and no one else will do"" (Alvarez 284). Regardless of the advice, she hides the kitten from the mother cat in her drum. The mother cat runs after Yolanda but it does not help, the kitten and the cat mother are separated. Regretting her actions, Yolanda throws the kitten out of the window, but after this incident, the mother cat keeps appearing during the night at the end of Yolanda's bed, and as we shall see below, the image of the mother cat continues to haunt Yolanda. At the very end of the novel, Alvarez draws lines from Yolanda's childhood and adulthood and thereby goes against the regressive chronology the novel has followed. The last few sentences of this chapter are important with regard to Yolanda's liminality and her sense of being "out of place":

> I grew up, a curious woman, a woman of story ghosts and story devils, a woman prone to bad dreams and bad insomnia. There are still times I wake up at three o'clock in the morning and peer into the darkness. At that hour and in that loneliness, I hear her, a black furred thing lurking in the corners of my life, her magenta mouth opening, wailing over some violation that lies at the center of my art. (Alvarez 290)

Yolanda is haunted by the past in her nightmares. In his analysis of the novel, the critic William Luis writes that the most important thing they recall is "Yolanda's own trauma of being taken from her natural environment, from her own litter; it was after this incident that her family moved to the United States" (847). In "The Drum" chapter, then, the stranger's advice that "a kitten belongs with its mother, and no one else will do," is also applicable to Yolanda: Yolanda belongs in her motherland, and no where else will do. With the exile, this sense of belonging has disappeared and Yolanda has therefore become "out of place" wherever she is.

As the excerpt above is the final sentences of the novel this ending, just like the other, has no resolution and rather reflects Yolanda's liminality. As we saw in Chapter One, Bolaki claims that the focus on how "traces of loss *persist* through melancholic attachments can paradoxically illuminate the creative potential of trauma" (36: original emphasis).[20] Yolanda's melancholic attachment is to her childhood on the Island and the loss of this life coincides with the loss of her sense of self: after the move to the United States and later when she is back on the Island, she is constantly viewed as a "matter out of place." In addition, the regressive narrative also points to the fact that the traces of loss persist in Yolanda's life. The nightmares therefore traumatize Yolanda and remind her of the life before she before she entered liminality.

Yolanda the Exiled Liminal Character

Not only do the "two endings" of the novel indicate Yolanda's liminality and that she has no sense of belonging anywhere as shown above, but I also suggest that the title of the novel, the nickname "Yoyo" and the phrase "un Dominican York" contribute to this. Whether the girls manage to lose their accents or not, as the title indicates, is not discussed in this chapter. Rather, another kind of loss that many critics have commented on with regards to the title is more interesting. Helen Atawube Yitah asserts that "While the word 'accents' in the novel's title suggests a linguistic loss, the novel seems as much about the loss of their native Spanish as it is about their loss of a firm grasp of their turning world" (234). With the move to the United States, Yolanda has lost her grasp of her own identity and this continues throughout the rest of the novel, as she does not manage to be re-incorporated into either the United States or the Dominican Republic.

[20] I will return to the creative aspect of trauma in the Conclusion of the thesis.

Another critic, Julie Barak, goes as far as to write that the "title is ironic" because although the four girls have managed to lose their accents, they will never be able to "completely lose or erase the memories of their island pasts or of their first language and the world view that supports it. Yolanda may return to the States to stay, but she will always be a divided self, acting on the *borders between the words of her two worlds*" (176: emphasis added). Although Barak does not use the exact term, she comments on the fact that Yolanda is betwixt and between "her two worlds." In addition, this divided self is also present in her nickname "Yoyo," as Luis has commented on: "One of her nicknames is Yoyo, which recalls the toy in constant motion, going up and down, moving from one extreme to the other, from one culture to the other, touching upon both but not remaining a part of either one of them" (847). Luis's idea of the Yoyo which is in-between cultures and identities is very fitting with regards to Yolanda's liminality.

The other phrase, "un Dominican York," also adds to the fact that Yolanda has no sense of belonging. In the novel, Yolanda's father is the character who uses this term when he decides to become an American citizen. He has visited the Dominican Republic when a revolution breaks out and chooses to return to the United States and pledge allegiance to the American flag: ""I am given up, Mami! It is no hope for the Island. I will become *un dominican-york*"" (Alvarez 107: original emphasis). This term also applies to Yolanda, as they both are exiles. In Spanish the word "un" is the singular masculine indefinite article, while in English it is a prefix which means "non." If one were to read the term in English, it would be "non Dominican York." In my opinion, this phrase relates to Yolanda's liminality as she neither is fully Dominican nor fully from New York, but rather a "matter out of place" in both settings. Moreover, I go even further and suggest that the double negation of the phrase also points to the fact that Yolanda experiences what the geographer Relph calls "existential outsideness." This category "involves a self[-]concious and reflective un[-]involvement, an

alienation from people and places, homelessness, a sense of the unreality of the world, and of not belonging" and furthermore, "all places assume the same meaningless identity and are distinguishable only by their superficial qualities" (Relph 51). In both the novel's endings it is evident that all places create Yolanda as a "matter out of place," and thereby make it impossible for her to feel a sense of belonging to a place. She, then, is an "existential outsider," as she is alienated from both people and places regardless of where she is. This predicament echoes the non-relational, non-historical and non-focus on identity which makes up Augé's concept of the "non-place." Hence, neither of the two endings resolves Yolanda's liminal phase and she is therefore not able to re-incorporate into society.

Darling: the Last few Pages of *We Need New Names*

Let us turn to *We Need New Names*. In Chapter Two, I showed that Darling continually rejects her surroundings both in Detroit and Kalamazoo. Rather than being in the present, she lives through her memories from her past life in the Zimbawean shantytown Paradise. At the end of the novel, Darling is still a teenager, but it does not matter what age she is as she goes through her own *rites de passage* which differs from the other two protagonists. This section focuses on the last few pages of the novel and explores the ending's circularity and what this indicates with regard to Darling's completion of the *rites de passage*.

The Circular Ending

Darling fantasizes nostalgically about her homeland, and this is something which continues up until the very end of the novel, as the three last pages describe a memory. This is one she has from Paradise when she and her friends created the bin Laden game. Darling is reminded of this memory when her uncle tells her that bin Laden has been found in Pakistan: "When America put up the big reward for bin Laden, we made spears out of branches and went

hunting for him. We had just appeared in Paradise and we needed new games while we waited for our parents to take us back to our real homes" (Bulawayo *WNNN* 288). In this excerpt Darling thinks back to the very beginning of her life and to a certain extent the novel is therefore circular: the story ends where it started, as Darling once again is in Paradise.

In fact, many of the aspects that make up Paradise are mentioned in the final paragraphs of the novel. Almost all the important characters partake in the memory: her friends Sbho, Chipo (who talks because this memory is prior to her pregnancy), Godknows, Bastard and Stina, and her grandmother Mother of Bones. In addition, the settings, which made up Darling's childhood, are all present in the last few pages. This includes the "Fambeki" mountain where Darling went with her grandmother to church, "Mzilikazi" the street the children were not supposed to cross, "Budapest" where the rich people lived and, of course, "Paradise" (Bulawayo *WNNN* 288-89).

Yet, the most important imagery at the end of the novel, and which brings us directly back to themes from Darling's life in Zimbabwe as well as the novel's first chapter, is the death of the dog Ncuncu and the smell of Lobels bread. As we remember from Chapter One, when Darling lived in Paradise, she saw a woman who had hung herself with eyes that "look like they want to pop out" (Bulawayo *WNNN* 17). Bastard's reaction in this scene, which Darling and her other friends support, is to steal the dead woman's shoes, sell them and run away to use the money to buy bread which has "the dizzying smell of Lobels bread" (Bulawayo *WNNN* 18). In the final chapter of the novel, the exact same image of an eye popping out is present when Darling remembers Ncuncu lying dead on the ground: "One eye popped out (I could not see the other)" (Bulawayo *WNNN* 290). Furthermore, the "dizzying smell" is also there, as the truck that kills Ncuncu is full of Lobels bread, which the last sentence of the novel describes as follows: "And the delicious, delicious smell of Lobels bread" (Bulawayo *WNNN* 290). Bulawayo thus leaves the reader with a horrifying image of a

memory of meaningless violence and death. Interestingly, what initially drives Darling away from Zimbabwe is also the most memorable, much like with Yolanda in the very ending of her story. Both Darling and Yolanda leave their homelands because there is political unrest in the countries. For Yolanda, the trauma of being separated from her Island life is manifested in her melancholic attachment to the past (cf. Bolaki). The traces of a lost life are not forgotten, but rather haunt her in her dreams. Darling, just like Yolanda, has a melancholic and nostalgic attachment to her lost life: she continually thinks fondly back to her past in Zimbabwe. But the question is then: is it possible for Darling to re-incorporate into American society?

It is important to note that although the last few pages of the novel bring Darling back to "her Paradise," the reality is that she is still in Kalamazoo. The ending is therefore very interesting because it does not conclude with the present but rather the past, and consequently has neither closure nor resolution. It suggests that it is impossible for Darling to re-incorporate into American society as she is psychologically and melancholically attached to the traces of her past. As shown above, Thomassen writes that one must feel "at home *in* and *with* the world" in order to exit the liminal phase (*Liminality and Modernity* 17: original emphasis). This is not how Darling feels about her surroundings in the United States because they cannot compare to her idealized life in Paradise; rather, Darling is just as "out of place" in the United States as she was when she arrived. With the continual imagined "home-coming" to Paradise, it is unfeasible for Darling to ever have a "home-coming" in her present life in Kalamazoo. Rather than being incorporated into society, Darling, just like Yolanda, is an existential outsider.

As we saw above, people who are existential outsiders experience among others "homelessness" and a sense "of not belonging" (Relph 51). Darling is homeless in that she does not feel at home in the United States and her Paradise is just a memory. What is more, Darling does not feel like she belongs in her own present and rather reminisces about her past.

By reminiscing about a traumatic memory from and of the past, Darling is in fact temporally "out of time" because although the memory pertains to the past and not the present, it transcends chronology, as it is a disruptive break from time and thereby has no time. It is rather a frozen moment outside of time. Darling is therefore an existential outsider in that she both does not belong anywhere and also lives through the imagined traces of her past memories. Thus, the United States continues to be a "non-place" for the illegal immigrant Darling and she continues to stay in the liminal phase, as an "existential outsider."

Gogol: The Last Action in *The Namesake*

In Chapter Two, we saw that Gogol's liminal phase occurs because his sense of self as well as his name does not fit within either of his two cultures. His solution is to change his name into Nikhil and I argued that with the name change he attempts to create a hybrid identity but that he is not successful. In this section, the final chapter of the novel is focused on in a discussion of whether or not Gogol manages to re-incorporate into society. At the end of the novel the year is 2000, Gogol has recently gotten divorced from Moushumi, his father has been dead for a few years, and for the last time he celebrates Christmas in the house he has grown up in together with other Bengalis before his mother moves to India.

Reading "The Overcoat"

During the Christmas party, Gogol finds *The Short Stories of Nikolai Gogol* in the bedroom where he grew up and he immediately thinks of his deceased father. This is the book Ashoke gave his son on his fourteenth birthday in order to share his fascination with the Russian author Nikolai Gogol. In the course of Gogol's adolescence, he feels that to read the book Ashoke gave him "would mean paying tribute to his namesake, accepting it somehow" (Lahiri *The Namesake.* 92). However, at the end of the novel many years have passed, and when he

finds the gift from his father, he wants "to read the book he had once forsaken, has abandoned until now. Until moments ago it was destined to disappear from his life altogether, but he has salvaged it by chance, as his father was pulled from a crushed train forty years ago" (Lahiri *The Namesake.* 290-91). "The Overcoat" is of sentimental value to his father as one of the pages of the story in fact saved his life when the train he was on derailed. Because of this one page, the rescue team saw him and thereby saved his life. In the end of *The Namesake*, Gogol is curious to read the book because it can bring him closer to his deceased father and also to his namesake. Due to this curiosity, Gogol's last action, which occurs in the final sentence of *The Namesake*, is that "he starts to read" (Lahiri *The Namesake.* 291).

The Meaningful Overcoat for Gogol and Akaky

The story that Gogol begins to read at the end of *The Namesake* is Ashoke's favorite short story "The Overcoat," a story of immense importance to him as it saved his life. I have chosen to elaborate on the protagonist of "The Overcoat" Akaky Akakievich in comparison with Gogol Ganguli, because the two protagonists as well as the literary works mirror each other, but more importantly because the short story comments on the ending of *The Namesake.*

"The Overcoat" is situated in St. Petersburg and is about Akaky Akakievich who lives and breathes for his job as a copyist in the government. Despite the fact that the literary works are written more than 150 years apart and that the main plots and the settings differ vastly, "The Overcoat" and *The Namesake* have similar themes. Although not the main focus for this section, it is interesting to note that both Jhumpa Lahiri and Nikolai Gogol have given their protagonists alliterative names. In addition, Akaky, just like Gogol, is given an "odd… and somewhat far-fetched" name when he is born (Gogol 72). However, the most striking theme is that both protagonists are liminal characters. As we saw in the previous chapter, Gogol's liminality is caused by the fact that his sense of self is anomalous with regard to his two

cultures. Akaky, on the other hand, is liminal in that he is an unremarkable, oppressed and poor service clerk character who is just a pawn within the bureaucratic system in St. Petersburg.

Even though they have very different liminal phases, Gogol and Akaky both find comfort in two different materialistic versions of an item with the same name: an overcoat. For Akaky this is the actual overcoat and for Gogol the story of the overcoat. In "The Overcoat," the excruciating cold and the fact that his old overcoat is all but a "dressing-gown" leads Akaky to buy a new coat in order to survive the winter (Gogol 78). With this decision, there is a change in Akaky:

> From that time onwards his whole life seemed to have become richer, as though he had married and another human being was by his side. It was as if he was not alone at all but had some pleasant companion who had agreed to tread life's path together with him; and this companion was none other than the overcoat. (Gogol 86)

For Akaky, the overcoat fills some kind of void, as he feels safe and no longer alone in his life. Just like Akaky takes comfort in his new overcoat, Gogol finds comfort in reading "The Overcoat," as it brings him back to his past. By opening the book, Gogol regresses back to a point in time which gives him a sense of origin, as this is the exact same story that saved his father's life in India. Furthermore, the opening of the book reveals even more as it also uncovers the reason behind his father's fascination for the Russian story and thereby also the reasoning why his father gave him the name Gogol. Just like Yolanda and Darling, Bolaki's claim describes Gogol in the end because the "traces of loss *persist* through [the] melancholic attachment" to the book, as it is a way to re-connect with his deceased father (36: original emphasis). In fact, the opening of the book only enforces the loss of his father. *The Namesake*

concludes on an open-ended note, and whether or not Gogol re-incorporates into society is uncertain. However, I argue that this ambiguous end can be read to imply that he does not re-incorporate, as his opening of the book does not give any solution to his dual identity.

Concluding Remarks

The first epigraph of this chapter, Antin's famous quotation "The past was only my cradle, and now it cannot hold me, because I am grown too big" (364), exemplifies, as I have argued, a re-incorporation into society. Her past identity was lost in order for her to be Americanized. Yet, for Yolanda, Darling and Gogol the past is *still* their cradle in different ways. At the end of the novels, the three protagonists regress to past memories from their childhood: Yolanda is haunted by the memory of her childhood years on the Island, Darling thinks back to her Paradise, and Gogol is comforted by his deceased father's favorite short story "The Overcoat." The past cradles and gently protects Gogol and Darling from their current lives, while Yolanda, rather, has nightmares about her past. Because none of the protagonists give up their heritage culture and rather regress to the past, none of the three characters are able to re-incorporate into society, and therefore their liminal phases persist. The question is then what are the implications of the fact that the three protagonists are unable to re-incorporate into society? This is what the conclusion of this thesis discusses.

Conclusion

> "What then is the American, this new man? … *He* is an American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced" (Crèvecoeur 312-13: original emphasis)

In *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (1975), Turner distinguishes between "liminars," "outsiders," and "marginals." The third term is relevant with regards to Yolanda, Gogol and Darling as it includes "migrant foreigners [and] second-generation Americans" who "are simultaneously members (by ascription, optation, self-definition, or achievement) of two or more groups whose social definitions and cultural norms are distinct from, and often even opposed to, one another" ("Passages, Margins and Poverty" 233). These marginal people "are also betwixt and between, but unlike ritual liminars they have no cultural assurance of a final stable resolution of their ambiguity" (Turner "Passages, Margins and Poverty" 233). Turner therefore suggests that there is no possibility for the marginal to enter the re-incorporation phase. Similarly, Thomassen writes that: "[m]inority groups may be seen as taking up liminal positions (willingly or not). To a degree, immigrant groups or refugees are liminal, being betwixt and between home and host, part of society, but sometimes never fully integrated" ("The Uses and Meanings of Liminality" 19). Thomassen's definition of the immigrant in perpetual liminality describes Yolanda, Darling and Gogol as they are never "fully integrated." Furthermore, the three protagonists fit Turner's term marginal because they are in-between cultures with no resolution to their ambiguity. *The Namesake*, *How the García Girls Lost their Accents* and *We Need New Names* can all be read

as fictional depictions of what the current immigrant experience is for many immigrants today all over the world. It may be that their host and heritage cultures are too different and because of this divergence, many people therefore end up as marginals.

One of the themes I have inquired is whether the protagonists are able to assimilate into American society. In the quotation above, Crèvecoeur outlines how this is possible. His idea that one has to let go of one's "ancient prejudices and manners" in order to embrace new ones interestingly echoes with Turner's idea that one has to be a blank slate during the liminal phase, a *tabula rasa* "on which is inscribed the knowledge and wisdom of the group, in those respects that pertain to the new status" (Turner *The Ritual Process* 103: original emphasis). In other words, Crèvecoeur's idea of how immigration is achieved corresponds to a successful *rites de passage*. In the previous chapter, we saw that Antin's autobiography exemplifies both because during her liminal phase she is able to be a "blank slate" and let go of her "prejudices and manners."

However, as we saw in Chapter Three none of the immigrant protagonists in the novels I have explored are blank slates during their liminal phases: they do not give up their heritages and "manners." Rather, the discussion shows how they all fit within Bolaki's idea that "traces of loss *persist* through melancholic attachments [and] can paradoxically illuminate the creative potential of trauma" (36: original emphasis). At the end of the novels, the protagonists all regress to a "melancholic attachment" to their past, albeit in different ways: Darling is stuck in her reminiscing about her past life in the beloved Paradise, Yolanda is drawn back to her past Island life by her haunting dreams, and Gogol opens a book which takes him back to the origin of his name and consequently of his self. However, the "creative potential" of trauma Bolaki refers to has not been explored, a creativity that does not apply to all the protagonists. Yolanda is the one who is the most creative with regards to her past because she is an author who channels her emotions of loss into her work. I suggest that

Gogol also partakes in a certain kind of creativity, as he reads the work of the author whose name is the reason behind his alienation. Darling, on the other hand, does not engage in such potential in her remembrance of the memories of her past. The three protagonists are, then, attached somehow to their past, and as the discussion has shown, they all end up, just like Nikolai Gogol's protagonist Akaky, with prolonged versions of the liminal phases.

Both Nyatetũ-Waigwa and I have applied the *rites de passage* in our analyses of novels, albeit of different kinds, and my findings are in line with what she concludes in her book *The Liminal Novel*: "At the close of the novel the protagonist is still in the middle of the quest, either still moving towards what supposedly constitutes the final stage in that quest or having consciously suspended the adoption of a final stance" (3). None of the three protagonists discussed in this thesis get to the final stage of re-incorporation and therefore they are "suspended" in the liminal phase, unable to integrate and assimilate into the American society. This inability of assimilation resonates with Miller's research of earlier immigrant novels: "the archive of US immigrant novels written between 1870 and 1940 makes evident that fewer novels than we might expect conform to these conventions [of assimilation], and assumptions of uniformity" (201). The three immigrant novels explored in this thesis, then, seem to follow an early trend within the genre.

For further research it would be interesting to explore other immigrant novels with regards to the themes that have been discussed in my thesis and this can be done in various ways. The discussion could be extended to study other works of my chosen authors, such as Alvarez's *¡Yo!* (1997) and Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999).[21] Another possibility would be to carry out a diachronic, comparative study of immigrant novels as *rites de passage*. The study could comprise a selection of literary works starting with the 1870s until now, and would therefore include works from different immigrant waves. Consequently this

[21] *We Need New Names* is the only novel Noviolet Bulawayo has written up till now.

would give an interesting historical comparison of attitudes and ideologies of assimilation, and immigration to the United States throughout the years as this is reflected in the literary texts. One question would be whether the novels depict protagonists who successfully become Americans in Crèvecoeur's description and as exemplified with Antin, or if they rather follow the trend that Miller identifies.

This thesis has explored how *rites de passage* and other concepts from the social sciences can shed light on the immigrant experience in the three immigrant novels *How the García Girls Lost their Accents*, *The Namesake*, and *We Need New Names*. With reference to the concepts of the abject, "matter out of place," and "existential outsideness" I have been able to comment on how the immigrant protagonists do not *structurally* belong in the United States. Many of the terms I have discussed in my thesis are very relevant regarding today's immigrant and migrant situation, as they shed light on *structural* and *spatial* aspects of the immigration process. In conclusion, I want to briefly discuss how spatial terms, here exemplified with "matter out of place," are applicable to a very current migrant situation.

During the past few weeks, one specific migration has been given a lot of attention in the media, namely the refugees who migrate across the Mediterranean Sea. Tens of thousands of people risk their lives in hope of a better future in Europe. Not even halfway through the year, as many as 1 829 people are presumed to have lost their lives on this crossing ("Dozens Die").[22] These migrants have fled from among others the civil war in Libya and Syria, from the Al-Shabaab militant group in Somalia, and from the ruthless government in Eritrea (Lister). However, they are viewed as illegal immigrants and are therefore structurally "matters out of place," as they disrupt the order of European society. Tellingly, the leader of

[22] According to *BBC News* on the 5th of May 2015.

Frontex Fabrice Leggeri has said "that saving migrant's lives should not be the priority for his maritime patrols" and *The Guardian* comments that this is "despite the clamour for a more humane response after the deaths of 800 refugees and migrants at the weekend" (Travis).[23] Frontex's statement shows to a tendency with regards to this migrant situation: the attempt of shifting the responsibility onto someone else. Unfortunately, this gives the sense that the migrants are undesirable in Europe. This idea of the refugees as "matter out of place" is regrettably also present here in Norway in that the government's goal is to send help out of the country, rather than having refugees enter our country.

Thus, terms such as "existential outsideness," the abject, and "matter out of place" can be used to discuss both fictional immigration and immigration that also happen in real life: they shed light on how immigrants are viewed "structurally" with regards to the society they enter into. I choose to conclude this thesis with reference to a song by The Beatles to comment on how immigrants, both in fiction and in real life may feel like they are "nowhere people" in "nowhere lands" (Lennon).

[23] According to *The Guardian* on the 23rd of April 2015.

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